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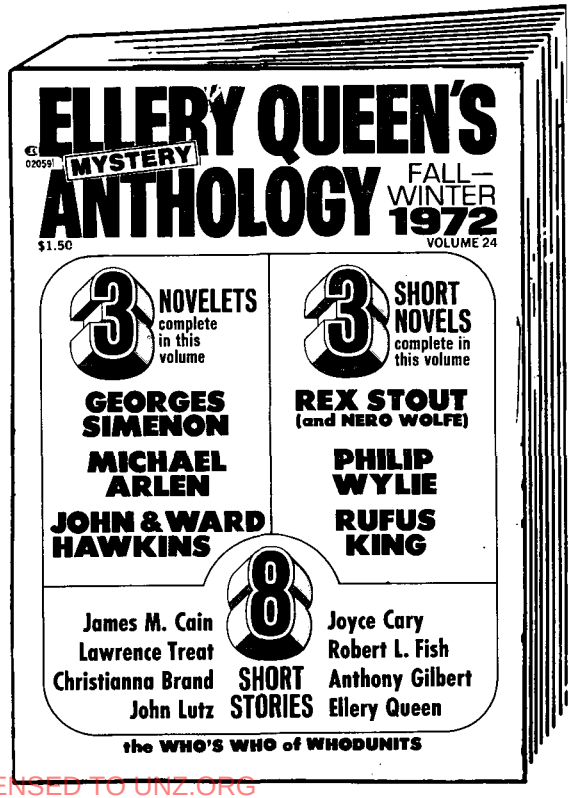

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ELLERY QUEEN'S *Mystery Magazine*

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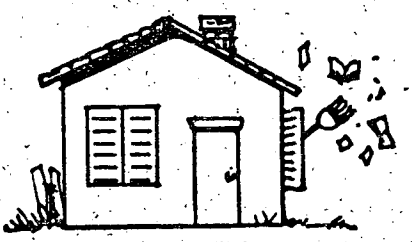

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PIERRE CHAMBRUN DEFENDS HIMSELF

by HUGH PENTECOST

New York has changed since I first came to work here only a few years ago. Luxury landmarks, great hotels, and famous restaurants like the Stork Club, El Morocco, Toots Shor's, the Colony, and the Café Renaissance—all have disappeared from the scene. People are afraid to go out at night; they hear you can be mugged, robbed, cut up just for kicks. But there is one place where luxury is still the theme song and where you can feel safe—the Hotel Beaumont

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where I work as its public-relations genius.

The Hotel Beaumont is still unmatched anywhere in the world. Its trappings are lavish, its culinary reputation is excellent, its wine cellar unsurpassed. Each room and suite in this great hotel is constructed to shut out the harsh sounds of a raucous world. It is like a small city in itself, run by an extraordinary executive named Pierre Chambrun, a legend in his time.

The security system is supervised by a wiry, sharp little man named Jerry Dodd. The Hotel Beaumont is *safe*. I've often come in late at night off the city streets and realized that I was letting out my breath in a long sigh of relief. Once through the revolving doors the automatic anxieties I'd felt as I'd circulated in the outside world evaporated. I was home—home safe.

And yet on a spring night of this year a violent and shocking murder took place inside that safety zone. A man was "cut up" for what appeared to be more than kicks. He was stabbed a dozen times by a missing knife—a butcher knife, the police believed. He was mutilated in a way that seemed to suggest that his death was meant to serve as a warning to someone or to some other persons. The killer had obliterated an eye with the knife and cut a diagonal line across the victim's face, obliterated the other eye, and then cut a crossing diagonal line. The result was bloody X. Someone suggested a gang killing, perhaps a Mafia vengeance.

The dead man was a West German diplomat, in residence at the Beaumont while he attended the current session of the United Nations. A gang killing didn't seem probable to me. Early evidence indicated that Erich Garber had been entertaining a lady who was someone else's wife. An outraged husband seemed much more likely to me than a gangster contract.

The Beaumont's staff was thrown a little off balance when the murder was discovered. It so happened that on that particular spring night Pierre Chambrun had made one of his rare excursions outside the hotel. We were, for a short time, a ship without a Captain.

Pierre Chambrun, a short dark little man with the brightest black eyes you have ever seen, buried in deep pouches, lives in the penthouse atop the Beaumont. He sunbathes there in decent weather. He exercises in the hotel's gymnasium. He rarely goes out. If people want to see him they

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come to him, usually in his second-floor office where a Picasso of the "blue period," a personal gift from the artist, is only one item of luxury in a large unofficelike room.

But on this night Chambrun had gone to a dinner. In what Chambrun referred to as the "black days," the early forties, he had fought in the French Resistance movement. The dinner had been a gathering of old friends and comrades-in-arms from that distant time.

Chambrun returned from the dinner accompanied by a friend, a French painter named Jacques Furneaux. He had insisted on Furneaux's stopping for a nightcap, a very special brandy reserved for very special occasions. He walked into a kind of organized bedlam. He found me in his office along with Lieutenant Hardy of Homicide, a friend from one or two other violences within the sacred gates.

I had been going over the dead man's card file with Hardy. We know more about most of our guests than they would care to have us know—their habits, their credit ratings, their past history as guests, how they handle their alcohol and even their private lives as they are lived inside the hotel.

Erich Garber was from West Berlin, an army officer in Hitler's battalions in World War II; a retread democrat, apparently. He was the vice-president of a large automobile manufacturing company, and his credit was impeccable. He had one of the most expensive suites in the hotel, and that means expensive. He gave small but costly parties. He was polite to employees, a generous tipper, and held his liquor like a gentleman. The one blemish on his record was a predilection for high-priced call girls. As far as the hotel was concerned he handled this with discretion, too.

Chambrun, wearing a scarlet-lined cape over his dinner jacket, walked into his office with his friend Furneaux, took one look at Hardy, and his eyes became those of a hanging judge. I should say here that anything that upsets the Swiss-watch efficiency of the hotel's operations is taken by Chambrun as a personal affront.

"Who?" was all he said.

"Erich Garber, a West German diplomat," I said.

"14B," Chambrun said.

"Yes, sir."

He threw his cape over the back of a chair, took one of his Egyptian cigarettes from a silver case, and lit it. He muttered introductions to Furneaux. "Mark Haskell, my public-relations man, and Lieutenant

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Hardy, Homicide Division of the New York City police." Hardy, who looks like an ex-Notre Dame fullback, blond, a little battered, grunted something. I nodded.

"How?" Chambrun asked.

"Knife," Hardy said. "Dozen or more stab wounds—nearly every one of them would have done the job. A big ugly X carved on his face—eye to chin, eye to chin."

Chambrun looked as if he had turned to stone.

"Sweet Mother!" Furneaux said under his breath.

I thought they were overreacting a little. "Most of what we know comes from a room-service waiter named Marcel," I said. "It seems he—"

"Marcel Durant," Chambrun said. He knew every employee's name and history. "Where is Marcel?"

"In the lobby office," I said.

"It would simplify things if I could hear the story from him instead of listening to it twice, first from you," Chambrun said. He walked over and sat down behind his carved Florentine desk. I called downstairs for Marcel, then walked over to the buffet in the corner and brought Chambrun a cup of the Turkish coffee he drinks from morning to night.

Chambrun waved to the buffet. "Make yourself a drink, Jacques," he said to his friend. He watched Furneaux go to the buffet and pour himself a stiff brandy. "When you mentioned the X cut on the man's face, Jacques and I were startled," he said. "We have just come from a dinner of former French Resistance fighters. Back in those days there was a Gestapo butcher who used to carve X's on the faces of our men whenever he caught them, blinding them in the process."

"Same thing here," Hardy said. "You know Garber from those days?"

"Not by sight or by name," Chambrun said. He glanced at his friend Furneaux.

"Not by name," Furneaux said. "Of course I haven't seen him here."

Marcel Durant, as you will have guessed, was French. He was an old man with gnarled arthritic hands. He had been with the hotel for many years, a top waiter in his time. His gradual crippling had removed him from the dining-room and grillroom staffs—he no longer could move quickly enough. He had been reassigned to Room Service where the functioning was more leisurely. He had a craggy, deeply lined face, and his eyes looked red and tired as he came into Chambrun's office.

"Monsieur Chambrun," he

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said in a husky voice, ignoring the rest of us.

"You've had a distressing evening, Marcel."

"It was horrible, Monsieur," he said.

"Take your time, Marcel, and tell it to me from the very beginning."

"I'll do my best, Monsieur." Marcel took a deep breath. "An order came to Room Service—dinner for two in 14B. Vichysoisse, roast veal, baby peas with onions, potatoes *au gratin*, a *vin ordinaire*. The dessert was to be ordered later. Dinner was to be served at eight o'clock."

"And you were prompt?"

"To the minute, Monsieur."

"Good. Proceed, Marcel."

"I rang the doorbell and Herr Garber opened the door for me and I wheeled in the wagon."

"You had served Garber before?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur. Herr Garber often dines in his suite. Very polite, generous tipper. Never tries to hurry me, for which I am grateful. He generally asks for me."

"So you wheeled in the wagon?"

"Yes, Monsieur. Herr Garber was not alone. There was a very beautiful young lady with him. She was sitting on the piano bench, watching me as I came in. You will remember there is a small spinet in 14B."

"Yes, Had you ever seen this young lady before?"

"No, Monsieur. She was very beautiful, as I've said, twenty or twenty-five years younger than Herr Garber."

Chambrun glanced at Hardy. "You've found this young woman?"

"Not yet," Hardy said.

"She was gone when I found the body, Monsieur," Marcel said.

"You found the body?"

"Yes, Monsieur. When Mrs. Kniffin let me into the room—"

"Please, Marcel," Chambrun interrupted. "Tell me the story in sequence."

"Yes, Monsieur. Herr Garber told me where to set the table. While I was doing so, the telephone rang and Herr Garber answered. He spoke in what I suppose was German. I do not understand German. He seemed very agitated. When he put down the receiver he turned to the young lady and spoke to her in French, which of course I did understand. 'It is a man I must see,' he said. 'It is urgent. Will you mind waiting in the bedroom, *cherie*? Unfortunately this man knows both you and your husband, at least by sight.' And so the young lady—"

"'You and your husband,'

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he said?" Chambrun interrupted again.

"Yes, Monsieur. His exact words. So the young lady hurried into the bedroom and Herr Garber turned to me. 'I'm afraid the dinner must be delayed, Marcel,' he said. 'Will you be good enough to take it away and call me in half an hour? If the dinner cannot be kept warm and palatable, you will replace it with a fresh order. I will, of course, pay twice.' So I wheeled out the wagon, Monsieur, and took it back down to the kitchen."

"So?"

"About twenty minutes later a call came to Room Service asking for me. It was Herr Garber. He said that his friend did not care for the wine he had in the room and would I bring him a bottle of St. Cristobel '57. Of course I said I would."

Chambrun's eyes widened. "St. Cristobel '57? That's what he asked for?"

"Yes, Monsieur. So I took up the wine and Herr Garber answered the door and took it from me."

"You didn't see into the suite—who was with him?"

"No, Monsieur. He said I shouldn't call for another half hour, that the dinner must now be replaced. When I called he would tell me exactly when to serve."

"Go on, Marcel."

"In a half hour I called 14B. There was no answer. I neglected to tell you, Monsieur, that he had given me a ten-dollar tip when I first arrived with the wagon. My time was up, but I wanted to earn the tip, so I stayed on. In about ten minutes I called again. No answer. And so, Monsieur, I went up to the fourteenth floor and to the door of 14B. There was obviously a gay party going on inside, Monsieur. Someone was playing the spinet and they were playing an old French song and singing. The lady was singing, too. You remember the song, Monsieur.

" '*Alouette, gentil' Alouette,*
Alouette, je te plumerai.' "

Chambrun had that frozen look. "I remember," he said.

"I rang the doorbell, Monsieur, but nobody answered. So, not wanting to interrupt till I was wanted, I went back down to the kitchen. I kept calling at intervals, Monsieur, without getting an answer. From my first visit to the room with the wagon until I became genuinely distressed must have been almost an hour and a half. I went back upstairs and listened outside 14B. There were no sounds now. I went to look for Mrs. Kniffin, the housekeeper on that floor. I was concerned

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—the dinner would be spoiled—the second dinner!

"If they had left, forgetting the dinner, I would remove the soiled glasses and the empty wine bottle. Mrs. Kniffin was unwilling at first. She had received a call from Herr Garber asking her not to send the maid to turn down the bed—the maid goes to turn down the beds at nine, as you know, Monsieur. But in the end I persuaded her to let me into the suite. We could always apologize. So Mrs. Kniffin let me in with her key—and there he was, dead, bloody, that great X cut on his face."

"And no young lady?"

"Nor anyone else, Monsieur."

Chambrun put out his cigarette and sat silent.

"The elevators are self-service at that time," Hardy said, "so no one saw a young lady leave that floor. Jerry Dodd is checking, but so far no report on her or on the visitor who phoned at eight."

"The visitor who phoned at eight is clearly the murderer," I said. "He'd have been as inconspicuous as possible. Garber's card indicates he had a penchant for call girls. If the girl Marcel saw was such a girl she'd take off in a hurry. Being found there would be bad for her business."

Chambrun's eyes turned my way and I thought he must hate me the way they glittered. "'Unfortunately this man knows both you and your husband, at least by sight.'"

He turned to the waiter. "Marcel, you would know this young lady if you saw her again?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur. Dark, svelte, very young, very attractive."

"You heard Herr Garber talk in German on the phone to his unexpected guest but you did not, of course, hear the guest's voice at that time. When you brought the St. Cristobel '57?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Later, when you heard them singing *Alouette?*"

"I cannot be sure, Monsieur. The girl was singing and one of the men. It was very loud, very gay. I couldn't say if it was the guest or Herr Garber. It was—how shall I say it?—like a comic act?"

"Is there anything else of consequence that comes to your mind, Marcel?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Thank you, Marcel. Will you wait downstairs again, please." Chambrun watched the old man go, and Chambrun's eyes narrowed to slits.

"Fingerprint men are going over the suite," Hardy said. "There are wine glasses and an

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empty bottle of wine—this St. Cristobel '57. In the bedroom were several cigarette butts stained with lipstick. The girl must have touched something. The girl puzzles me." When Hardy is puzzled he looks like a baffled St. Bernard. "She was in the bedroom when Garber's unexpected guest arrived—hidden there because the guest would know her by sight and might tell her husband. She hides there, but later she joins the party, singing that French song. After that someone cut Garber to pieces with what could have been a carving or butcher knife. Had the girl left before that? If she was still there when it happened, why did the killer let her live? Unless she was, all along, the killer's accomplice."

"That occurred to me," Chambrun said. "To make sure that Garber would be where they wanted him to be, she had agreed to a date with him. According to his card he liked young women, though usually they were professionals and not other men's wives." Chambrun lit a fresh Egyptian cigarette and leaned back in his chair, his eyes almost shut. "What do we know about the killer?" he asked softly.

"Nothing," Hardy said.

"Oh, come, Hardy, we know a great deal. At least four things. First, he speaks German. Garber wouldn't have spoken to him in German on the phone unless the killer was also speaking German. Garber spoke to the girl in French, which presupposes she was French—or that she was more familiar with French than English. Second, the killer was a man of rather special tastes. He asked for St. Cristobel '57. There are not two places in New York where that wine is stocked. It comes from a vineyard in Southern France. I discovered it some years ago, was entranced by its bouquet and flavor, and arranged to have a case delivered to me here each year. It is not ordinarily sold commercially. The vineyard owner keeps it for his friends. He produces only a small quantity each year. You are a connoisseur of wines, Jacques. Have you ever heard of St. Cristobel '57?"

Furneaux smiled. "Yes. I have had it here with you, Pierre. But nowhere else."

"So our killer had knowledge of an almost nonexistent wine," Chambrun said. "Third, he knows something about hotel routines. I have to assume it was he who called Mrs. Kniffin and asked her not to send the maid to turn down the bed. And fourth, it is possible he plays the piano. And doesn't it strike you as odd that these

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two German-speaking gentlemen should be enjoying themselves with an old French folksong?

"So we know this about our killer; he is a German-speaking wine connoisseur who knows the hotel routines and plays the piano, particularly the old French classic *Alouette*. Suggest anyone to you, Mark?"

"No," I said. "Should it?"

Chambrun's smile was a tight little quirk at the corners of his mouth. "I speak German, along with several other languages. I am not only a wine connoisseur, I have special knowledge of an obscure wine—St. Cristobel '57. I know the hotel routines better than anyone else in the world. I play the piano, as you very well know." He turned to Furneaux. "In the black days, when we could afford to be noisy, Jacques, do you remember that I played the piano?"

"Yes."

"And do you remember what song we sang most often when there was a group of us together?"

Furneaux seemed to have trouble swallowing. "*Alouette*," he said.

"To add to the case against me," Chambrun said, "I obviously have access to a hundred carving knives and a hundred butcher knives." His smile became a real smile as he looked at the scowling Hardy. "Open-and-shut case, friend? A wild set of coincidences? Well, my blood is not running cold with anxiety. You see, I know something you don't know, Hardy. I know I *didn't* kill Erich Garber. Fortunately I have an ironclad alibi. I was with Jacques, here, and our friends from the Resistance days from seven o'clock until I walked into this office a little while ago. You will swear to that, won't you, Jacques?"

"Of course. And so will a dozen others," Furneaux said.

"Is that good enough for you, Hardy?"

"Don't be a damned fool," Hardy said. "Sure it's good enough."

"It shouldn't be," Chambrun said, his voice harsh. "One thing we haven't discussed is the possible motive. I told you that the X carved on Garber's face was a shock to Jacques and me because that was what the Gestapo did to our friends back in the days of the Resistance. If Garber turns out to be, and I daresay he will, an ex-Gestapo man—if he was one of those X-makers in the old days—I would have a motive, and my alibi would be worthless. Jacques and my other friends would lie their heads off for me if I told them I was bent on

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following the Biblical precept of 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.' So my alibi is no good."

"What the hell do you want me to say to that?" Hardy asked.

"I want you to say that obviously it was meant to look like me," Chambrun said. "I want you to say that you realize as you head toward the truth someone will remind you of these incriminating facts about me. But let me cheer you up, my friend. I can provide an alibi that *will* stand up. Jacques and my friends might lie for me, but not the manager and the waiters in the restaurant where we dined tonight."

"So stop playing games with me," Hardy said, nevertheless sounding relieved.

"I can tell you one thing more about the killer. He is someone who knows a great deal about me—about my habits, my tastes, my talents. Someone who has known about me for thirty years—back to the black days of the Resistance." Chambrun's smile remained, a sort of Cheshire-cat smile. "Just one thing went wrong with the killer's plan to implicate me."

"Your alibi," Hardy said.

"In a way." Chambrun turned to me. "How many evenings do I spend away from the hotel, Mark?"

"Three or four a year," I said.

"Quite so. The killer had every reason to suppose I would be here in the hotel, moving about as I do every night. He set it up and unluckily for him he chose one of the rare occasions when I was away from my bailiwick. So now we proceed, Hardy. You always say that detective work involves checking, checking, and rechecking until the truth becomes obvious."

Lieutenant Hardy is a dogged cop. He takes hold of a case by the hind leg and he holds on for dear life, checking, checking, rechecking. Jerry Dodd, chief of security at the Beaumont, is by comparison mercurially dogged. He grabs hold, lets go, attacks from another point, lets go, until someone cracks under the pressure.

Jerry is a mad chain-smoker, and he paced up and down Chambrun's office listening to the Great Man's summing up of the case. Hardy had gone off to his dogged work of checking fingerprints, checking on Mrs. Kniffen, the housekeeper who'd got the call from 14B, checking the restaurant where Chambrun had dined—the last at Chambrun's insistence.

"So you make sense, or

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you're just building something up to irritate us," Jerry said to Chambrun. He is one of the few people on the staff who can speak his mind to the boss without bothering to be polite or careful. "Let's start at the top. Who is there in the hotel that fits the bill of speaking German, knowing your blasted special wine, knowing the routines—oh, to hell with listing it all. Who knows the hotel, you, and your habits of thirty years ago?"

"No one I know of."

"Because anyone could speak German without your knowing about it. Did you know I speak Japanese? Well, I do—never mind at the moment how it happens. Half a dozen maitre d's, room-service waiters, and chefs know that you drool at the mention of St. Cristobel '57. No secret that. Anybody could play the piano. Ever hear me on *The Darktown Strutters Ball*? There are a thousand employees in the hotel who know that the maids turn down the beds at nine o'clock unless otherwise instructed. Anyone living in the hotel, any employee has access to carving knives. It would take a year to check out all the possibilities."

"Please don't drop your ashes on my Turkish rug, Jerry," Chambrun grumbled.

"They're good for the rug," Jerry said impatiently. "There's just one phase of this we can narrow down. Who knows you used to play and sing *Alouette* for your Resistance pals in 1943? That touch is just a little too elaborate and it may hang somebody."

"I wish I had an answer to that," Chambrun said.

"Maybe it's not so hard as it looks," Jerry said. "This hotel is teeming with French chefs and French waiters and French chambermaids. You're a sucker for your native people. And you're a kind of hero they grew up on, most of them."

"You make me sound like the world's grandfather," Chambrun said. "I was twenty years old in 1943."

"And except for confusing things you're not a hell of a lot of help right now. That girl Garber was out to make could solve this for us, but unless Hardy comes up with fingerprints, or unless she's stupid enough to show herself to Marcel again, we can—we will have to—forget about her."

"So it would seem." Chambrun looked sleepy.

"So let's begin with Erich Garber. Was he a Gestapo man in the days they were carving X's on dead Frenchmen's faces?" Jerry said. He started for the door and stopped. "How many of your old

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Resistance friends attended that dinner tonight?"

"There were eighteen of us," Chambrun said. He nodded his head like a schoolteacher who is pleased with a precocious pupil.

"They can alibi you—but can all of them be alibied?" Jerry looked from Chambrun to Jacques Furneaux who had been silent in the corner all this time.

"Some of us arrived late," Furneaux said. "I was one of them."

"What kept you?"

"I work for the French delegation to the U.N.," Furneaux said. "I was held up decoding messages from the Foreign Office."

"What time did you get to the dinner?"

"About ten o'clock. That's why I came back here with Pierre. We'd had almost no time to talk of the old days."

"Garber was presumably dead by ten o'clock," Jerry said. "You can prove you were at the U.N.?"

"I didn't say I was at the U.N.," Furneaux answered quietly. "I was working in my own apartment—alone."

"No alibi?"

"No alibi," Furneaux said. "And to save you time, I fit most of Pierre's points. I speak German, I know about Pierre's fondness for St. Cristobel '57, I can play the piano. I don't know the hotel routines, but I have stayed here. I could have remembered that a maid turns down the beds every night."

"Go home, Jacques," Chambrun said, smiling. "If they decide to arrest you I'll let you know."

"So you want to make a joke of it!" Jerry Dodd said and stormed out of the office.

The time was creeping on toward morning. Chambrun had taken a few minutes to change out of his evening clothes and into a loose-fitting tweed suit. He must have drunk a gallon of his poisonous Turkish coffee and smoked a box and a half of his Egyptian cigarettes. He sat behind his desk, his eyes hooded. I could almost hear his mental machinery revolving, but I had no idea what it was producing.

About four in the morning Hardy turned up again. Slow and solid Hardy.

"We've picked up a lot of fingerprints in the suite," he said. "The girl's must be among them, along with Garber's and Marcel's. If the girl's prints match something that we or the F.B.I. have on file, fine. If not—not."

"Not, I imagine," Chambrun said.

"Marcel's story checks and

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double-checks," Hardy said. "Garber—or at least someone in 14B—ordered the dinner. The veal was special—with a special wine sauce. The girl who took the order remembers that Garber was most painstaking about it, including a wish for some flowers for the table. 'I am entertaining a lady,' he told the order girl. He then asked, politely, if he could have Marcel to serve him. 'He knows my ways,' he told the girl.

"Promptly at eight Marcel delivered the dinner. Ten minutes later he reappeared in the kitchen with the word that Garber wanted the dinner held—kept warm if possible—for half an hour. Later Marcel did call 14B, just as he said. The girl was at his elbow when he made the call. No answer. Just as he said, Garber had called in the interim and asked for a bottle of St. Cristobel '57."

Chambrun's eyes opened. "Garber called?"

Hardy checked his notebook. "14B called—a man. Who else?"

"The killer who was trying to frame me," Chambrun said. "That's who else."

"At any rate, the girl located Marcel who was puttering around the kitchen worrying about the dinner and had him take up the wine. He came back in a sweat. Another half hour at least. The chef would have to prepare whole new servings. No answer when he called in half an hour. Something, he thought, might be wrong with the phone, so he went upstairs. That's when he heard the singing and piano playing. He came back down and told the Room Service girl about it.

"It was now getting late. Marcel was unhappy; he'd collected his tip so he felt he had to wait. Eventually he went back upstairs. That's when he went to Mrs. Kniffin and explained his problem. In the end he persuaded her to open the door—and they found Garber dead and the girl gone."

I thought for a moment that Chambrun had gone to sleep while Hardy was talking, but he lifted his heavy lids to look at the lieutenant. "Is Marcel still here?"

"I asked him to stick around," Hardy said. "I've got an artist on the way from headquarters to see if Marcel can help him sketch a likeness of the girl. That girl is about our best bet."

"If she's a regular hooker the people in the Trapeze Bar and the Blue Lagoon Room will recognize her," I said.

"Could be," Chambrun said. "I'd like to watch the picture process. Can it be done up here?"

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Hardy shrugged. "Why not?" He hauled himself to his feet. "I have to check in at headquarters. Victim a diplomat. We'll be up to our necks in State Department characters."

I don't know if you've ever seen one of these Police Department experts work up a portrait likeness of someone simply from the description of an eyewitness. This one talked to Marcel, fooling away at a sketching pad as he asked the old man questions. Small eyes? Wide eyes? Set close together or far apart? Eyebrows thin or thick? Hair worn long, short, loose, or close to the head? Mouth wide and generous or tight and thin? Ears flat or protruding, small or large?

Marcel, obviously near exhaustion and suffering some pain from his arthritis, was nevertheless eager to help. The police artist sat in a chair near the office door, with Marcel watching over his shoulder. I was circulating, taking a look every minute or two at what the artist was coming up with: a dark girl with hair worn short and shaped to her head, wide come-hither eyes, a smiling mouth. Marcel appeared satisfied with the growing likeness.

"It is truly astonishing how you do this, Monsieur," he told the artist.

The girl on the drawing pad would certainly have been attractive enough to interest a man like Erich Garber.

What happened then was so sudden, so unexpected, so terrifying that I find it impossible to describe it adequately, except to say that in the crisis I froze. I was still wandering and was at the opposite end of the office from the door. Marcel, near the door, was bending over the chair where the police artist worked. Chambrun, his eyes closed, was slumped in his desk chair.

The office door opened. When I say it opened I'm not being precise. It burst open. An unbelievable figure stood there. He had some kind of stocking mask pulled over his face and he was holding a gun in his right hand. He aimed it directly at Chambrun—and fired.

I saw Chambrun topple out of his chair. This monster took another step into the room to fire again.

As I've said, I froze. I couldn't move. But Marcel moved. He let out a great shout and stumbled toward the masked man, clawing at him with his crippled hands. They wrestled for an instant and then the gun went off again.

Marcel seemed to bounce, but he clung to the masked man. Now the police artist was struggling out of his chair and I

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saw Chambrun, on his hands and knees, opening a desk drawer where I knew he kept a gun.

Then the masked man wrenched himself free of Marcel, turned, and ran out of the office. Marcel dropped to his knees, then toppled over onto his side. The police artist was off after the would-be assassin, and Chambrun and I reached Marcel at the same moment. The old man was clutching at his stomach and blood trickled through his fingers.

I didn't have to be told to call Dr. Partridge, our house physician. Chambrun knelt beside the old man, talking gently to him in French. I came back from the phone. Dr. Partridge was on his way.

"I thought he got you," I said to Chambrun.

"You have to be damned good or damned lucky to hit someone with a handgun at thirty feet," Chambrun said. "Except on television."

"But who in God's name—"

Chambrun turned his head, his face grim. "Someone who believes I killed Erich Garber," he said. "As good a guess as any. Get Jerry on the job and call Hardy and have him check Garber's staff at the U.N." His eyes darkened. "This old boy is pretty badly hurt."

"He saved your life," I said.

"I owe him," Chambrun said. "Check his employment card. If he has family I'm afraid they should be notified."

The masked man had made good his escape. He'd raced down from the second floor by the stairway and out onto the street before the police artist could get close enough to stop him. Dr. Partridge, looking grave, had moved Marcel to the hotel's small hospital. I had checked Marcel's employment card and found a home number for him. A sleepy and quickly frightened woman answered the phone. She turned out to be Marcel's granddaughter and she said she would leave at once. I told her to come directly to Chambrun's office.

Marie Durant was an attractive young girl, small, slim, with long, beautiful, quite natural red hair. She was deeply concerned for her grandfather. Dr. Partridge already had the old man on the operating table, so he couldn't be seen.

"I have to warn you, Miss Durant," Chambrun said, "that the signs are not hopeful." He told her how it had happened and how deeply in debt he felt to Marcel. "It took great courage," he said. "More than that, it was the instinctive reaction of a brave man."

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Marie lowered her head and wept quietly. Chambrun walked over to the sideboard and poured some brandy into a glass. He carried it back, balanced in the palm of his hand.

"It will do you good, Miss Durant, to drink this," he said.

She took it from him, gratefully. She drank it and put the glass down on the table beside her. Then Chambrun did a peculiar thing. He took the handkerchief out of his breast pocket and used it to pick up the glass and carry it back to his desk.

"I am sorry to play such a trick on you, Miss Durant," he said in a flat voice. "Your fingerprints are on that brandy glass. You and I know they will match the fingerprints the police have found in Erich Garber's apartment. Shall we talk together, without the police, before we decide what is to be done?"

I thought he was off his rocker. This girl looked no more like the portrait the police artist had drawn than I did.

"Your father was Marcel's son, was he not?" Chambrun asked, quite gently.

She nodded.

"Your father was killed by Garber?" Chambrun asked.

Now I knew he was off his rocker. The days of the Resistance were thirty years ago. This girl couldn't be a day over 21 or 22.

The girl had turned a deathly white. "Erich Garber was with the Gestapo in Paris in the days of the occupation," she said. "My father, I am told, was with the Resistance. Some of his friends were killed and—and marked with the X. And then—then the girl with whom my father was in love was abducted, turned over to the Gestapo swine for their pleasure, and eventually killed. My father swore he would track down the man responsible if it took his whole life.

"Five years after the war he had not succeeded. He met and married my mother. He had given up his plan for revenge, they tell me. I was born in 1952. My father had a job as a salesman for a pharmaceutical firm. He had to take a trip to Rome and on that trip, on the train, he came face to face with Erich Garber.

"We never knew exactly what happened. My father fell—or was thrown—from the train. When they found him he was at death's door and he muttered the name 'Garber' to the people who found him. It meant nothing to them or to the authorities, but my mother knew what it meant—and my grandfather.

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"I was one year old, so it meant nothing to me. My mother died that same year. Marcel decided to come to America and he brought me with him. I have been raised here, Mr. Chambrun, had my schooling here. I was like any other American girl, except for one thing. Every day of my life my grandfather reminded me of my father and how he had died, reminded me that some day we would find Erich Garber, some day we would even the score. And I—well, it was like a religion, Mr. Chambrun. I came to believe in it."

She drew a long shuddering breath. "Then, about a month ago, he came home in a state of great excitement. Erich Garber had a suite here at the Beaumont, the very place where he, my grandfather, worked."

"Then the planning began," Chambrun murmured.

"Yes. You see, my grandfather isn't a maniac, Mr. Chambrun. He wanted to square accounts for my father, but he also wanted to go on living. He was going to commit a crime, but he meant to get away with it. Circumstances helped him. Garber entertained a good deal in his suite and my grandfather ingratiated himself with this villain as a Room Service waiter. He learned a great deal about him, among other things that Garber was attracted to young girls." She shuddered. "Grandfather developed his plan. One thing was essential. He had to be sure that Garber would be in his suite when the plan was put into action."

"And that's where you came in?"

She nodded. "I spent a couple of evenings in the Trapeze Bar and just as my grandfather knew it would happen, Garber picked me up. He invited me to have dinner with him last night in his suite and so—and so there it was."

"And the plan was to frame me for the crime," Chambrun said. His eyes had a cold light in them.

"Yes and no. Don't you know, Mr. Chambrun, that you are a great hero to my grandfather? From the old days of the Resistance? To him you are a knight in shining armor."

"But he was prepared to pin a murder on me!"

The girl's eyes widened. "Who on earth would really believe you had done it, Mr. Chambrun? It would merely blur the trail, but no one would believe you guilty. If, finally, you were thought guilty, I assure you my grandfather would have stepped forward."

The red button on Chambrun's phone blinked and he answered, listened, then put the

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phone down. "Your grandfather is conscious, Miss Durant. It may be for only a very short time. Unfortunately, he's not going to make it." He glanced at me. "Take Miss Durant down to the hospital, Mark."

The girl stood up. "Am I under arrest, Mr. Chambrun?"

"I am not the police," he said.

I rejoined Chambrun after I'd left Marie Durant sitting by Marcel's bedside, clinging to one of his gnarled hands. The old man seemed curiously peaceful.

Chambrun was sipping coffee. He looked very tired.

"How on earth did you guess she was the girl in Garber's suite?" I asked.

"Guess? Hardly a guess. You see, I had come to the conclusion some hours ago that Marcel was our man," he said. "The girl, whoever she was, was his accomplice. Therefore the police artist's portrait, which came out of Marcel's description, was obviously worthless. There is no such girl as the girl in the portrait."

"But why had you fixed the guilt on Marcel? His story checked at every point."

"My dear fellow, it checked at so few points," Chambrun said. "Follow along with me. Garber did order dinner and he did ask for Marcel to serve it. That came through the order girl at Room Service. Check. But from there on, Mark, almost nothing checks. Marcel said he delivered the dinner. While he was setting up the table, he said, Garber had a phone call from someone he spoke to in German. It could be—but it can t be checked. We don't keep a record of incoming calls at the switchboard, as you know. There may or may not have been a call. Marcel took the dinner back to the kitchen. That checks."

"Just a minute," I said. "Marcel said that after the phone call from the German-speaking person, Garber asked the girl to go into the bedroom. And she did go. We know that—fingerprints."

"Yes, she did. She went because Marcel did not want her to witness the savage and bloody killing. If I am right, and I'm sure I am, among the things on that serving table with the dinner was the murder weapon—a carving knife. Marcel could have taken it from the kitchen without being observed. I think he killed the unsuspecting Garber in the first two or three minutes he was in the room—murdered him, marked him with the gruesome X. Then he sent his granddaughter

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home. Think. After that he called the room and got no answer. Naturally—there was no one there to answer."

"But there was a call *from* the room—for the special wine."

"Do you remember what the Room Service answering girl said, Mark? There was a call from 14B asking for a bottle of St. Cristobel '57. She had some trouble finding Marcel, she said, who was 'puttering around' in the kitchen. I suggest to you that it was Marcel himself who made the call from one of the innumerable phones on the kitchen level. His use of the phone would have drawn no attention. He had been calling 14B periodically to inquire about serving the dinner.

"The St. Cristobel was part of his plan to point to me. So he took the wine up, let himself into the suite, and left it there with a dead man. He says Garber took it from him at the door, but that can't be checked. No one saw it happen. Again, he called asking that the maid be kept away. Mrs. Kniffin says the call came from 14B. How could she know, except that someone said, 'This is 14B. Please don't send the maid.' The call could have come from anywhere in the hotel. Again, no way to check. All very clever, Mark. His story cannot be proved, neither can it be disproved."

"Then what made you think—?"

"One mistake. Marcel made one mistake. One thing that could *not* have happened the way Marcel said it did."

"What, for God's sake?"

Chambrun smiled. He sang softly.

"Alouette, gentil' Alouette,
Alouette, je te plumerai."

"He heard them singing. A macabre business, but he said he heard them," I said.

"The song was one of my favorites in the old days," Chambrun said. "It helped to point to me. But—how long have you worked in the Beaumont, Mark?"

"Six years."

"Then you know that part of Marcel's story must be a lie."

I started to say I knew no such thing, then my jaw sagged. "The rooms are soundproofed!"

"Head of the class," Chambrun said. "From the hallways you can't hear *anything* that goes on inside the rooms. And one lie in Marcel's story made everything else suspect."

"What are you going to do?"

"He is going to die—having saved me from an assassin. I shall have to tell my story to Hardy in spite of that."

"And the girl? She is an accomplice."

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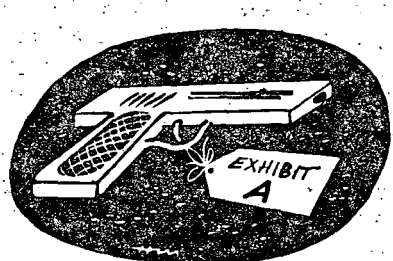
He gave me an odd look. "Which girl, the granddaughter or the girl in the portrait?"

He was thinking, I knew, that Marcel Durant would never kill again; that he owed Marcel something. However, he didn't have to make that decision. Marie came forward to make a full confession of her involvement and Marcel's to Lieutenant Hardy.

Chambrun's would-be assassin, the man in the stocking mask, did not escape entirely. The police did manage to track him to the West German secretariat where he hid, for a time, behind the shield of diplomatic immunity. It seemed the word of Garber's death had reached his staff, and a young man with a hero impulse, interpreting the first evidence to mean that Chambrun had killed Garber in retaliation for old horrors, had decided to take the law into his own hands. But for Marcel he might have succeeded. There would be a long wrangle between governments over what was to become of him, but from our point of view the case was closed.

"And now we have a hotel to run," Chambrun said.



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a *NEW* Ed Gorgon story by

JON L. BREEN

It's World Series time—the change of seasons, fall to winter, baseball to football. But before the baseball season ends for this year, here is the newest story about Ed Gorgon, major-league umpire and a blockbuster of a detective—in the strongest story so far in this unusual series . . .

FALL OF A HERO

by JON L. BREEN

I spent the last day of the 1972 baseball season in New Hopton, home of the Grizzlies, who had finished the season in their customary last-place spot. Why they have become so much at home in the cellar is another story altogether, but that was why I happened to be there and how I happened to get called in by my old friend Sergeant Rojas on an unusual murder case. Ed Gorgon is my name, by the way, and I am a major-league umpire by profession.

Sergeant Rojas, knowing I'm anxious to get out of town and on my way home, tries to get my interest immediately. "A ballplayer died last night, Ed. We had to scrape him off the sidewalk. He fell between twenty and thirty stories."

"Who was it?" I ask, naturally curious. "One of the Grizzlies?"

"No, his uniform says he's a member of the New Hopton Comets. Number twenty-four."

"Comets? Never heard of them. You say he was found in his uniform?"

"That's right. On the sidewalk in front of a downtown apartment building. In uniform. And not a ball park within walking distance."

"Fell, jumped, or pushed?"

"We're not sure."

"And just who are the New Hopton Comets? Semi-pro team? High-school team? College team?"

"Ed," he says, with the careful timing of a comic delivering the punch line, "as far as we can determine there is

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no such team as the New Hopton Comets. We have checked the college, high-school, grade-school, and semi-pro leagues. We have checked the Little League, Pony League, Babe Ruth League, American Legion, Commercial Leagues. We have checked the donkey leagues and the wheel-chair leagues. And there just is no such team as the New Hopton Comets."

"Was the guy an actor?"

"We have also checked with every legit theater in the city of New Hopton. We have also checked the advertising agencies. Ed, we have checked every damn body we could think of to check, and we don't know what this poor guy was doing in a baseball uniform, where the rest of his team is or even if they exist, or, by the way, whether he fell, jumped, or was pushed out of that window. Or, I might add, what window it was he fell, jumped, or was pushed out of."

By now he has me hooked and I know I have no intention of leaving the city of New Hopton, ordinarily not one of my favorite stopovers, until I know the answer to all those questions. Before personally meeting with Sergeant Rojas at the scene of the crime I ask one more question.

"Know who the guy was?"

"That we know," Rojas replies, his tone suggesting that he hopes I won't be too disappointed.

The victim is Theodore Clayton, a black man in his middle thirties who was an insurance salesman. By all appearances a solid citizen, he lived in a nice, neat, fairly new apartment on the eighteenth floor of a high-rise near the center of New Hopton. This is also the building from which he fell to his death, but his wife claims he didn't fall from their window, and there's no physical evidence to suggest she's lying.

The interrogation of Mrs. Clayton, as Sergeant Rojas reports it to me, went like this:

"Did your husband play baseball?"

"Once in a while. Pickup games in the park. But he never belonged to a regular team."

"Never played for a team called the New Hopton Comets?"

"No, he never played in a regular league, where they had uniforms and all that. Not since he was in high school."

"Did he go to school here in New Hopton?"

"No, in Cleveland."

"Did you see him in his uniform?"

"No, but he brought home a box with him yesterday after-

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noon that might have had a uniform in it. He wouldn't show me what was in it."

"Did he seem apprehensive? Worried about anything?"

"No, he was in a fine mood. Very playful, kind of excited."

"Excited? How?"

"Sergeant, I got the idea he was going to play some kind of joke on somebody, or something like that."

"When did you last see him alive, Mrs. Clayton?"

"Around eight thirty. He'd helped me finish the dinner dishes, then disappeared into the bedroom. I heard him moving about in there—I guess he was changing into that baseball uniform, since he left the clothes he had on in there. He left without my seeing him, didn't say a word to me. He must have thought he'd be back before long."

"But he wasn't."

"No, the next time I saw him he was—he was down there like that . . ."

"Can you think of any reason why your husband might take his own life?"

"No, sir. Absolutely none."

The Q-and-A of it sounds so cold and mechanical. I'm glad I didn't have to talk to the widow. Police work is no bed of roses. By comparison umpiring is, and I feel happy about my choice of profession as I sit in a coffee shop with Sergeant Rojas, listening to what he had to say about being a detective.

"Routinely, of course, we had to check out everybody who lived in the building, especially on his side of it. We got a list from Mrs. Clayton of who her husband's friends and acquaintances were, and we paid particular attention to them. Most of them were on the same floor they live on, and that floor, Ed, is not without its share of cuckoos and oddballs. On one side of the Clayton apartment is a supersexy blonde named Mae—spelled M-a-e."

"Mae?" I echo.

"I know it's hard to picture a blonde bombshell today named Mae, but that's her name and she imagines herself a great friend of the Claytons—the white liberal thing, you know, some-of-my-best-friends-are-and-so-on. Mrs. Clayton is not fond of this lady, because she feels Mae's chief goal in life was to add Clayton's scalp to her belt, and having talked to the lady I can believe it."

"Is Mae a student?"

"A grad in sociology at the University. Her family apparently has money—those apartments aren't top-class, but they're no youth hostel either."

"Maybe palling around with members of minority groups is part of her research on her

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thesis. Think she'd go for a white Southern umpire?"

For this insincere pleasantry I get a glare from Rojas. After all, he's on duty. My season has just ended, but his never ends and time's-a-wastin'.

"Mae, of course, denies she saw Clayton that night. Also denies that baseball uniforms turn her on. I would think that if Clayton's little joke was to visit Mae, he'd be a little more careful keeping it from his wife.

"Then there's Mr. and Mrs. Victor Walsh. They live on the other side of the Claytons. Walsh is a recently retired construction worker. He's only in his fifties, but retired early because of a bad ticker. Walsh says Clayton was a drinking buddy of his. Although Walsh is a hard-hat, he seems proud of having had a black man for a friend, though I can't say he appears very broken up about his friend's death. He says he's always gotten along very well with 'the colored,' as he calls them."

"Is Walsh a baseball fan?"

"His wife says he's crazy about all sports. She doesn't know anything about them. The Walshes are going through a late crisis in their marriage, Ed. She says ever since late last March or early April he's been closing himself in his den for several hours every night and won't tell her what he's doing. It's driving her nuts."

"Was Mrs. Walsh home at the time of Clayton's death last night?"

"No, Walsh was home alone. She'd gone out to a movie by herself. Walsh denies he saw Clayton, says he didn't know what happened until he heard the ambulance and police sirens and heard the commotion down below."

"Didn't anyone hear Clayton scream as he fell?"

"They don't always yell, Ed, and besides he might have been knocked out or dead before he fell. I don't think the medical examiner will be able to tell for sure."

"Did Walsh tell you what he spends all his time doing in that den?"

"No, he talked all around it. Some research he's doing or some puzzles he's working on or some kind of phoney-baloney like that. He was very evasive. Of course, it's his business, unless we have some reason to connect it with Clayton's death."

"Right. Anybody else of interest?"

"Oh, sure. There was—"

Rojas goes on to tell me about other neighbors of the Claytons' but I find my attention has begun to wander. That's why I'd never make a

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cop. I'd get my mind fixed on one theory or one possibility and reject what might be other worthwhile information just to pursue a hunch.

The rest of Rojas' account does not grab me, so that's why I'm omitting it. But as he talks I'm planning a little visit to the Claytons' building.

"Mrs. Walsh, when exactly did your husband start going in that little room, not telling you what he was doing?"

She is a small, dumpy, motherly-looking lady, very cordial and very worried at the same time. I haven't told her I'm a cop, but I did drop Sergeant Rojas' name and she seems eager to help me: She goes to check her calendar.

"It started April first, Mr. Gorgon. But I don't understand. Does this have something to do with what happened last night?"

"Ma'am, we just ask lots and lots of questions, and we don't even know till after we've asked them which ones really needed asking. Will your husband be home soon?"

"It's hard to tell now that he doesn't work regular hours. He usually goes down to Moe's Tavern for a drink before dinner with his friends. I don't know if it's good for him, but he has to have some interests."

Walsh comes home soon and I make no effort to snow him. I introduce myself as Ed Gorgon and he knows me right away. He pumps my hand like a long-lost friend.

"I used to hate umpires!" says Walsh, his round face beaming. He's a little guy but solidly built, obviously a man who has done physical work for a living, and it's surprising to know he doesn't any more.

"You like us now?"

"I do, yes. I've come to realize how important umpires are. They're somebody in authority. And nobody seems to respect authority any more. These kids today. It's ridiculous."

"Vic, Mr. Gorgon is working with Sergeant Rojas," Mrs. Walsh tells him.

"Oh? Say, that's right, you are considered sort of a detective, aren't you? Remember that killing out at the stadium a couple of years ago, Alice? Ed Gorgon figured that one out, didn't you?"

"I lent a hand, Mr. Walsh, but I don't feel I can do the policeman's work for him."

"I sure hope you get whoever got Ted Clayton. He was an all-right guy. We used to drink together down at Moe's Tavern. By the way, will you have a beer, Ed? If I can call you Ed?"

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"Sure, Vic. I guess we're of the same generation."

"Come on in the den, Ed. Alice'll bring us our beer."

There are sports souvenirs all over the room and two big easy chairs. I see no evidence of whatever it is Walsh works so hard on, but there is a little writing desk in the corner and several volumes that look like ledgers on a small bookshelf next to it.

"You've been an ump a long time, haven't you, Ed?"

"Twenty-five years."

"Wow! Say, you've seen lots of players come and go, haven't you? Seen lots of changes."

"Oh, yeah, I sure have," I say, swigging the beer, letting him do most of the talking.

"The kids that play the game have sure changed, haven't they? The guys that used to play, back when I first followed baseball, guys like Ruth and Gehrig and Foxx and the Gas House Gang. They were guys you could look up to. They were heroes. Real honest-to-goodness heroes. But these kids now! How can you look up to them? How can you respect them? They're just ingrates. That's all they are, a bunch of damn pampered, spoon-fed, namby-pamby ingrates. Isn't that so?"

"It's hard to lump them all together like that."

"Oh, I know there are some real ball-players left. A guy like Killebrew and a guy like Brooks Robinson. But most of them—I guess you know, Ed, that a lot of us fans, us real hard-core fans, have gotten kind of disgusted with these young ballplayers just lately. Do you know what I mean?"

"Well—"

"Do you know what I mean? You know what I mean, don't you?"

"Yeah, I do. It's a funny thing you should bring that up, Vic. Your wife tells me you started shutting yourself up in this room for hours at a time since April first, the very day it started."

He gives me a sly smile. "Yeah, you caught on to that, didn't you, Ed? Don't much get by old Ed Gorgon. That's right. I started the day of the baseball strike. The day they killed baseball, I call it. I know they started playing again after a while. I know they had a season. But it was never the same. You found that, too, didn't you?"

"In many ways it wasn't the same," I agree.

"No, it never can be again. The twenties and the thirties were the Golden Age, Ed. It can never be that way again. Alice! Another beer, Alice! So I guess you know what I've been doing

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in here, Ed. It's no secret to you, is it?"

"I've got an idea."

He leans back in his chair and decides to tell me all about it. "I have an eight-team league going, Ed. I think eight teams is about right, don't you? Expansion spoiled a lot, thinned out the talent too much.

"So I have eight teams. They all have their points—some have good pitching but not much hitting; some have all kinds of hitting but no defense. You know how it works. But they're pretty well balanced. New York had a six-game lead going into September, but the New Hopton team came on to beat them the last day of the season.

"Sudden Sid Warburton pitched a two-hitter against Philly, and Oscar Clyde, the big slugger of New Hopton, had a three-run homer in the bottom of the ninth. Oscar Clyde also won the batting title and the home-run title and the RBI title. Yeah, old number twenty-four. Warburton won just that many games, twenty-four, but he's number thirty-four. They gave me a lot of thrills, Ed."

I just sit there. It's what I figured, but it's still spooky.

Walsh reaches for one of the ledgers. "I got the records all in here, Ed. I keep very full records. Want to see some?"

I look over the pages—the columns of names and statistics, the standings, the batting averages, the earned-run averages. Finally I say, "This is really something. A whole imaginary baseball league."

He looks at me with sad eyes. "Sometimes it seems more than imaginary, Ed. It's good to be able to tell somebody about this, somebody who'd understand. Not many people would. Alice is a great girl, but she'd never understand this."

"Didn't you ever tell anybody?"

"Oh, no."

"Really? How could you keep it to yourself, Vic? Didn't you tell *somebody?* Maybe when you had a couple of drinks?"

He grins sheepishly. "Oh, yeah, maybe then."

"You might have told the gang at Moe's Tavern about it, huh?"

"Yeah, I might have."

"You might have told Ted Clayton then?"

He glances at me sharply, his eyes looking a little hunted now, a little harried.

"Oh, no."

"He was a good friend of yours, wasn't he?"

"Just a guy I knew. Didn't know him too well."

"But you told him about the New Hopton Comets, and about their big star, Oscar

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Clyde, number twenty-four."

"I'm sure I never—"

"So as a joke on you he came here last night. He'd rented a baseball uniform from a costume company and got them to put New Hopton Comets, number twenty-four on it. He came here dressed up as Oscar Clyde. Just as a joke."

"That would be kind of funny, but he never came here."

"Oscar Clyde is a hero, isn't he, Vic? A real sports hero."

"I never saw Ted Clayton last night, I tell you."

"When you saw Clayton pretending to be your hero, it must have made you pretty mad, didn't it, Vic?"

"No, why should it? I mean, even if he did come here, why should—"

"Mad enough to kill him, to push him out the window."

"No, no." In his sudden calm Vic takes a long slow swallow of the beer. He is suddenly all reason. "It doesn't figure, Ed. Why should something like that make me so mad, even if it happened, which it didn't?"

"Your league was part of the Golden Age, wasn't it, Vic? A league of the twenties and thirties, right?"

"Those were the days, Ed. That was the real baseball."

"Ted Clayton would be an obscenity in the Golden Age, wouldn't he, Vic? He couldn't possibly be Oscar Clyde in the Golden Age."

"No, they didn't have his kind back then. You really are an understanding man, Ed. I wouldn't kid you. You know why seeing Ted in that uniform made me so mad, why I knew he was an impostor. You know what it was like in the old days."

"Yeah," I say, nodding. "All the players were white."

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a NEW short story by JOAN RICHTER

"Pete would never forget the searing flames . . . He would never forget the screams either. Even in memory he couldn't tell which was which, his or Harry's. In a way it was the screams that held them together . . ."

A MATTER OF TRUST

by JOAN RICHTER

Pete stood in the dark shadow of the east hangar watching the starry Mexican sky. His gaze was steadied on the northern quadrant, waiting for the plane's lights to appear; but he was listening, too. Depending on the wind the sound of the engine might come first.

Harry was only fifteen minutes overdue—too soon to worry, except there'd been no radio contact with him for the last two hours. And no word from the drop spot either.

Pete sucked in his breath and let out a deep sigh. Both he and Harry had managed to survive two and a half years in Vietnam, scarred, but alive. To have it end for Harry in a nose dive on some piece of Arizona desert wasn't the way it ought to be.

Pete shook his head and tried to get rid of the grisly thought. Maybe Harry was just messed up a little and any minute would come limping in.

Then why not radio? And what about the ground? Why had they lost contact with them, too? Only a fool could think the two were unconnected.

Come on, Harry, a familiar voice inside him screamed. Don't let your old buddy down. Don't make a fool and a dead man of me!

Only a few minutes ago Brewster had reminded him of something he had almost forgotten in his concern over Harry's return. "Sure glad we weren't dumb enough to trust him on this first run. You can never tell with a guy, not till you test him out."

"Hold on, Brewster," Pete

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had said. "Harry's only a few minutes late. Already you're blackballing him. Hell, what's fifteen minutes?"

"It's more than the fifteen minutes. Why haven't we heard from the guys on the ground? I've been trying for the last two hours."

Pete shrugged. "Maybe they had to scatter. Maybe they weren't there when Harry landed. Maybe Harry went off looking for them."

"Then why hasn't he called in?" Brewster leaned back in his chair and bit the end off a cigar. He struck a match on the edge of the desk and went through an elaborate procedure of lighting up. He let out a bellyful of smoke and looked at Pete. "I'd be a helluva lot more worried if those bricks had been the real stuff. This way all we lose is a plane."

"And a man," Pete said quietly.

"No loss if the guy is chicken or a thief."

"Boy, you sure have a lot of faith in your fellow rats."

Brewster stared at him through the cloud of smoke.

"I'm glad we understand each other."

That was when Pete had walked out the door into the soothing darkness of the night. Had he stayed inside he might have put a fist into Brewster's face. Maybe more than that. He had walked slowly across the airfield until he reached the hangar and then stood leaning against it, watching the sky, waiting.

Come *on*, Harry, the voice inside him screamed again. You can make it. Get the hell back here. I'll be a dead duck when Brewster finds out I let you fly the real stuff.

A faint hum touched Pete's eardrum and he turned his head to catch the sound, but it was too elusive to pinpoint. His glance scanned the sky. He turned around and looked to the south. Harry might have to come in that way, depending on the wind pattern. But none of the lights twinkling in the sky was moving.

The humming sound seemed to fade away. It might have been the motor of a small car somewhere in the distance. But there were no lights on the road, no distinguishable shadows moving on the dark flat horizon.

He couldn't stand still and wait any longer. He had to do something, if only walk. He started across the airfield, keeping in the shadows so that if Brewster were looking outside he wouldn't see him roaming around. He didn't want Brewster to get the idea he was nervous. Nervous? That was

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hardly the word for the way he was feeling. He could do with a drink or a few pulls on some fresh grass. But that was a rule anyone who worked for Brewster had to live by. "Off duty, I don't care what you do, but when you're on my time you're clean. I don't want any dope heads around my planes."

A gust of dry cold wind scudded across the flat plain and blew dust into Pete's eyes. They smarted and he rubbed them. Tears flowed and washed the dirt away. The wetness that touched his cheeks made him realize that what he wanted to do was cry. The frustration of not knowing where the hell Harry was or what had happened to him or what Brewster would do when the whole thing came out was getting to him.

Why had he got into this rotten racket anyway? Maybe if he had tried a little harder and waited around a little longer, a job would have turned up. But he'd got tired of waiting, tired of being turned away with "Sorry, soldier, we're not hiring." Hell they weren't hiring. Who were all those guys working inside? Maybe it was the scars on his face they didn't like. Maybe it was his limp.

Brewster hadn't cared a rap about his scars or his messed-up leg. He just liked the fact that Pete could patch up a plane and make it fly even if all he had to work with was a coat hanger and a pair of hedge shears. And when Pete had told him about Harry, Brewster had said for him to come on down. "If the guy can fly as well as you say he can I don't give a damn what he looks like." And then Brewster had asked Pete the only personal question he ever had. "What the hell happened to the two of you—a fire bomb go off in your faces?"

"That's about it," Pete had answered, but said no more. He didn't like to talk about it or think about it. He would never forget the searing flames licking at his face, heating up the rims of his goggles so that they branded scars around his eyes that no plastic surgeon would ever be able to mend. Hideous scars. But if it hadn't been for the goggles he and Harry would be blind now.

He would never forget the screams either. Even in memory he couldn't tell which was which, his or Harry's. In a way it was the screams that held them together, that bound them in some crazy way. He didn't know what was with Harry now, why he was late, but he could hear his screams, screams that maybe he wasn't even yelling. And Pete was answering them with his own.

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Harry, where are you? Come on, old buddy, you can make it.

The night was suddenly very silent around him. The hum he had heard had not been repeated. He realized now what it had sounded like—a small plane coming in on a glide, the movement of the wind sliding off the wings.

Pete bent his head against a fresh swirl of dust and started toward the office. Harry was half an hour late. It wouldn't do any good to stay away from Brewster now. Soon it would be time for Pete to tell him everything—that he hadn't followed orders but had let Harry take off with the real stuff.

How could he have pulled a stunt like that on Harry? Harry didn't need to prove himself to Pete. At least that was the way Pete had felt only five hours ago when he'd passed up the last chance to make the switch, when he'd stood at the end of the airfield watching Harry take off into the deepening dusk, headed north for the border, flying low so that no radar device could track him, following the course Brewster had plotted with him, pointing for an obscure piece of Arizona desert where he could make a quick landing, unload, and take off again. A matter of minutes.

What had happened? What had gone wrong?

Brewster was into a new cigar. The other lay half smoked in the big flat bowl of an ashtray on his desk. The room stank. Pete left the door ajar to let in some air.

"Any word?"

Brewster looked at him in an ugly kind of way. "Who from? Half an hour late on a two-hour run?"

"Did you try contacting the drop spot again?"

"What good would that do?"

Pete felt anger flush the scarred tissue of his face. "What good? Hell, we might find out what happened to Harry."

"We know what happened to Harry. He chickened out. He just didn't have it. I took a chance on him. I could tell he still had the shakes. It was my decision. I don't hold you responsible."

"You're saying he cracked up?"

"Cracked up, blew off somewhere, took a nose dive—I don't care what you call it. He isn't here now. What's the difference?"

"There's a big difference. Maybe he's out there somewhere and needs help. Maybe he landed at the drop and something went wrong."

"Like what?" A long puff of smoke billowed out of Brewster's mouth.

"Like the guys waiting

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didn't like the idea they'd made the trip for nothing," Pete said. Hell, I'm getting all mixed up. Harry *had* the real stuff. So nothing should've gone wrong at the drop.

Pete moved closer to the desk. He didn't like the sly smile that was beginning to play around the corners of Brewster's wet lips.

The smile spread. "You're saying that when they found out your buddy wasn't carrying what they wanted they mussed him up?"

"Didn't you tell them? Didn't they *know* this was a phony run?"

"Who said anything about it being phony?"

"You did."

"Yeah, that's right I did. But you're the one who put the stuff on the plane. You should know."

"Okay, Brewster. I let Harry fly with the real stuff. Pulling a deal like that on him would have been like knifing him in the back. Harry's the one guy in this whole rotten world I couldn't do that to. You should've known that."

Pete saw the smile on Brewster's face widen into a grin. "Sure. I knew. And so I took care of it myself. Only my timing was a little off. I waited too long to contact the guys in Arizona. When I tried to get them they weren't at the drop yet and there was no answer at the other place. They're a smart crew. They keep moving up until the last minute. So you see, they didn't know this was a phony run. But then I figured if everything you told me about Harry was true, he was the kind of guy who could take care of himself."

Brewster stopped talking and the grin seemed to die on his lips. A strange look came into his eyes. As Pete watched him he felt a cold draft touch the back of his neck and move down along his spine, as though a door had suddenly opened letting in the chill night air. Then he heard the footstep behind him and spun around.

He almost didn't recognize the man in the doorway. His khaki shirt and pants were in shreds, stained with blood from the cuts and bruises on his face and arms. Pete stared dumbly at the gun pointing at him.

"Yeah, Pete, it's me back from the dead again," he heard Harry say, only it didn't sound like Harry's voice—the life had gone out of it. "I wonder how many times a guy has to die in this damn world. I thought I'd done all the dying I was ever going to do. Dying is easy. It's the coming back that hurts. But I had to come back this time, no matter how hard it was." He

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coughed and blood spattered on the floor.

"What happened to you, Harry?" Pete took a step toward his friend.

"Easy, Pete. Just stay put."

"What's the matter with you? What happened?"

"You know what happened. You were in on it, old buddy. When I landed that heap of a plane and hauled all that stuff out and those three tough guys checked it, they didn't like what they found and they let me know it, a little bit at a time. They thought they'd finished me and I guess I thought they had, too, but then something went off in my head and I started coming back. I picked them off one at a time. Three pops of this gun and there were three guys on the ground licking dust."

Pete stared into the dark hole of the gun barrel. Harry. The familiar name formed on his lips, but no sound came. He looked into his buddy's battered face and knew it was too late for explanations. The screams had started again—his screams and Harry's mixed together.

He heard the first shot and somewhere behind him a gurgling sound came from Brewster's throat.

Then the second shot sounded and Pete felt the leap of fire in his chest. With it the screams stopped and slowly the pain began to slip away.

Then he heard Harry's voice, close beside him, tranquil, soft, resigned. "This is it, old buddy. There won't be any coming back this time. Not for either of us."

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a NEW Nick Velvet story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Number 16 in the series about Nick Velvet, the master thief—and, with each new adventure, the master thief comes closer to being the master sleuth. Nick, you will recall, is a unique felon: he never steals anything of intrinsic value, like jewels, money, or objets d'art. His only objects of larceny are worthless things, bizarre or baroque things that most people would discard, throw away—like the worthless reel of spoiled film for which a small-time Hollywood actor was willing to pay Nick's minimum fee of $20,000. And before the adventure reached its denouement, Nick was forced to out-Lupin the law . . .

THE THEFT OF THE FOGGY FILM

by EDWARD D. HOCH

To Nick Velvet, the unique thief-detective, Hollywood seemed little more than a collection of familiar street names remembered from old motion pictures. Even when he was seated in the faded plush of Martin Wade's Beverly Hills apartment, facing the aging actor, it still seemed merely a scene from an old Grade-B movie.

"Your first trip to California, Mr. Velvet?"

"My first on business," Nick replied. He thought there was a certain sadness about the actor, a sadness that went with things and people when they'd outlasted their usefulness. Martin Wade looked almost exactly as he had on the movie screen in the 1950's and the television tube in the 1960's. He was silver-haired and in an odd way ageless, the kindly uncle whom everybody loved but nobody hired any more.

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"I'm glad you could get out here on such short notice. This thing has to be accomplished within the next twenty-four hours if it's to be done at all."

Nick nodded. "Just what do you want stolen, Mr. Wade?"

The silver-haired actor winced at the word. "I'm presently playing a small walk-on part in a film called *Centrifuge*. It's being shot on location around Los Angeles. Two days ago, on Friday afternoon, we finished a week of filming at L.A. International Airport. During one long take near the airport's moving sidewalk, the film was fogged due to a technical error. As a result, the scene will have to be reshot. I want that foggy film before it's thrown away."

"That's a tall order," Nick admitted. "I don't even know the layout of the studio."

"That's why I needed an expert like yourself. I understand you once robbed a film studio in Paris."

Nick nodded. "But under different circumstances. I had more time, for one thing. Just what is your interest in this fogged film? You know I never steal anything of value."

"Oh, it's worthless all right. The lab will probably discard it tomorrow. And Scalifini, the director, won't even notice it's missing."

"Scalifini? I've heard the name."

Martin Wade nodded. "He's one of the best in the business with chase and action pictures."

"All right," Nick decided. "I'll do it. You know my fee?"

Another nod. "Have the film here tomorrow evening and you'll get your twenty thousand."

Nick knew the uselessness of trying to enter the studio on a Sunday, especially with no idea of its layout. He decided to spend the time instead at the airport, the scene of the shooting.

The airport was a busy sprawling place, more crowded on a Sunday evening than it had been when he arrived earlier in the day. It took Nick only a few minutes to realize that he'd find nothing here to explain Martin Wade's urgent summons and carefully unexplained assignment. He was heading back to his rented car when he felt a sudden hand on his shoulder. There was only one person who greeted him like that.

"Charlie Weston!"

"Nick Velvet. Still up to your old tricks?"

"I'm on vacation, Charlie." Weston was an ex-cop from New York who'd tangled with Nick a few times in the past. He was one of the few lawmen in

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the country who knew Nick by sight and by occupation.

"Sure, you are," Charlie Weston answered. "Always vacationing, aren't you? How's Gloria?"

"Fine. Catching a plane, Charlie?"

"No. Just got in this morning, matter of fact."

"Still with the Eastbridge Police Department?"

Weston shook his head. His face, always too small for his beefy body, seemed as intent as ever. "I've retired."

Nick relaxed. "That's good news. Nothing better than a retired cop, I always say."

"Oh, I keep busy. Couldn't just sit around the house, you know."

There was something in the tiny eyes that put Nick back on guard. Charlie Weston still had the look of a hunter. "You've taken another job?"

Weston nodded. "Special investigator for the National Jewelers Association. A diamond salesman was murdered and robbed in the airport parking lot. You wouldn't know anything about it, would you?"

"I've never fooled around with anything valuable like diamonds, Charlie. You know that. When did it happen?"

"They found his body in a rented car yesterday morning. He was probably killed shortly after he landed on Friday afternoon."

"How much was stolen?"

"Nearly half a million, mostly in small diamonds. Easy to dispose of."

"Salesmen travel with that much on them?"

"It's their job. We keep security as tight as possible, mainly constantly changing their travel routes. This particular trip was arranged at the last minute and I'd have sworn it was safe, foolproof. I gave him the ticket myself and no one else knew which plane he'd be on. They didn't even know if he was going to L.A. first." He stared glumly into space. "It's a crime that couldn't have happened—but it did."

"If I hear anything I'll let you know," Nick promised, anxious to get away. After another moment he left Weston standing there and hurried back to the parking lot.

The robbery and murder of the diamond salesman, probably on Friday afternoon at about the time the movie was being shot, might have been a simple coincidence. But Nick had learned long ago to mistrust the appearance of coincidence. He found a pay phone and called Martin Wade at his apartment.

"This is Velvet. I'd like to

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meet your director, Scalifini. Tonight, if it can be arranged."

"Not possible," Wade replied. "He's having a party for the cast at his home to celebrate the end of shooting. I'm just leaving for it now and I can hardly show up with you in tow."

"You could. Tell him I'm a free-lance writer doing an advance article on the picture. He'll be thankful for the publicity."

"I don't know, Velvet."

"If you want to conclude our business deal tomorrow, I have to get into the studio. Scalifini is my key."

"All right," Martin Wade decided with a sigh. "I only hope nothing goes wrong."

"Nothing will," Nick assured him, hoping it was true.

Abram Scalifini lived in a large rented home in Bel Air, not far from the junction of Sunset and Beverly Glen Boulevards. He was a flamboyant man of vague European background who'd come to America a decade earlier after making his reputation for successful action films. He welcomed Nick without question, seeming to view reporters and writers as a permanent part of the Hollywood scene.

"The press is very friendly here. They take my photograph, they write about my films." He was a large man, still in his forties, but with a completely bald head and a weathered face that made him seem much older.

"I'm interested in *Centrifuge*," Nick said. "What's it about?"

"A chase film. Very good, very exciting. The airport scene comes at the end. There is a suitcase full of money!" He gestured elaborately. "We have filmed at the airport all week for a ten-minute sequence, and now we must reshoot one scene Tuesday because my cameraman fogged the film." He grabbed Nick by the sleeve and steered him across the room. "But you must meet my cast."

The day of the Hollywood superstar was past, but Nick recognized one man in the group—an aging actor named Walter Robin who'd once been part of a popular comedy team known as *A Couple of Birds*. Like Martin Wade he was now reduced to small character parts or occasional walk-ons. "It's not the old Hollywood," he told Nick, pouring himself another drink. "Wade and I are in the same boat—has-beens. Nobody wants us. These days the leading men all have to be young and sexy, with lots of hair. Not even handsome, just sexy."

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Scalifini steered Nick away from the man and introduced his leading lady. Veronica Blair was a girl of beauty and poise who belonged to the new school of acting. She smiled and extended her hand. "I'm sure I've read your articles, Mr. Nicholas. Haven't you been published in *Harper's?*"

"Frequently," Nick agreed readily. "It's a pleasure to meet someone who reads. And you're as charming off screen as on."

She turned to the scowling young man at her side. "This is Ronnie Hazzard. He has the male lead in *Centrifuge.*"

Hazzard, whom Nick recognized as a transplanted off-Broadway actor, had the wild sullen look that young audiences identified with these days. In 30 years he might be another Robin or Wade, but right now he was on top. "You don't look like a writer to me," he challenged Nick. "You look more like a con man."

Nick smiled. "That's your problem, not mine." But he managed to edge away and join a more friendly group at the bar.

Presently he felt a tug on his arm and Veronica Blair said, "I hope he didn't offend you. This is his first time in Hollywood and he thinks it's very mod to put everyone down."

"I'm used to it," Nick said. "What do you think of the picture?"

"It's really thrilling. Audiences will love it!"

"You're reshooting a scene on Tuesday?"

"Just one. The processing lab says part of the film was light-fogged when they developed it. Scalifini blames his cameraman, and the cameraman blames someone else."

"Is it possible I could visit the lab tomorrow, then watch the shooting on Tuesday? It would help my story."

"Sure—talk to Scalifini. He loves publicity."

He took her advice and cornered the director later in the evening. "See me tomorrow at the studio," he told Nick. "I'll show you around."

Martin Wade was standing close enough to hear. He raised his eyebrows in approval.

Triumph Studios was a product of the television age, the sole remains of what had once been the largest movie-making complex in the country. The sound stages and back lots had been sold off in pieces, for oil drilling and shopping centers and office buildings. What remained were 150 acres acquired by Triumph Studios in 1967, for the production of movies for television and occasional theatrical release.

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For all its faded glory the studio was still a bustling place on a Monday morning, and Nick found Abram Scalifini in a busy cheerful mood.

Hurrying to keep up with the fast-moving man, Nick suggested, "Maybe I should see the processing lab, just to get a fully rounded article in my mind."

Scalifini shrugged his meaty shoulders. "If you wish, though there is nothing to see but cans of film."

The lab was a dimly lit room, with slotted shelves on all sides that held cans of film awaiting processing, printing, or editing. Off this main room were individual darkrooms where automated equipment performed the actual processing operations. Farther along in the same building were the editing and sound-mix labs.

"Where are my rushes?" Scalifini demanded of a white-coated employee. "Have you spoiled them along with the other reel?"

"We're printing them up now," the man answered calmly. "And that negative was fogged before it reached us. Either your cameraman did it or someone tampered with the film can after it was sealed."

"Why should anyone do that?" Scalifini wanted to know.

"Could I take a look at it?" Nick suggested. "While we're waiting for the rushes?"

The technician shrugged and took down a film can from the shelf. "We've got it in a can with the other out-takes from Friday's shooting. Usually out-takes are saved if they're of any possible use, but on something like this we'll just dispose of it. We wouldn't even have bothered printing it if we'd known it was fogged."

He switched on a Movieola and threaded the reel of film into place. On the viewer Nick saw a sudden flash of color, then a scene inside one of the airline terminals, along the moving sidewalk that connected the ticket counters with the gates. The entire right side of the viewing screen was irregularly fogged and streaked, but Nick was still able to follow the action.

"That's it," the technician said, switching off the Movieola and rewinding the film. "No good for anything."

"What could have caused fogging like that?" Nick asked.

"Light got in after the film was exposed. It hit the right side of the reel, just for an instant. Or maybe somebody lifted the cover by mistake."

"I see." Nick watched the reel go back into its can, noting especially the piece of adhesive

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tape that identified the can as *Centrifuge Out-Takes.*

They left the lab a few minutes later and continued their tour at various sound stages where shooting was in progress. "Fascinating," Nick said as they left a set where the second-unit director was finishing some bridging scenes for *Centrifuge.* "But tell me about the airport climax you filmed on Friday."

The director waved his hand. "A chase sequence. You saw part of it on the Movieola. I used the moving sidewalk inside one of the airline terminals."

"Unusual setting."

"Not really. Mike Nichols used it for the main titles of *The Graduate*, but I think I am using it somewhat differently."

After lunch, when Scalifini went off to the screening room, Nick departed with a promise that he'd be at the airport the following day to watch the reshooting of part of the final scenes. But he did not return immediately to the main gate. He'd discovered on their morning tour that security at the studio was tight only at the main gate. Once inside, no one questioned his right to be there.

He entered one of the buildings and walked quickly along the hallway until he found an empty office where the secretary was still out to lunch. The studio directory yielded the number of the processing lab, and he dialed it. When a voice answered, Nick said, "This is Miller. I'm sending a messenger over for the out-takes from *Garden Party.* Have them ready."

The man on the other end mumbled agreement and Nick hung up. He dialed the messenger service next and gave very careful instructions. An hour later, feeling pleased with himself, Nick telephoned Martin Wade from a pay phone outside the studio.

"I have it," he said simply.

"Great! Come over at seven."

It was as easy as that.

That evening, while the October sun was still visible low in the western sky, Nick Velvet walked into Martin Wade's faded apartment building in Beverly Hills. He was humming softly to himself as he rode up in the elevator, carrying a shopping bag from the Farmers' Market. In it, nestled beneath two heads of lettuce, was a film can holding the foggy print of one of the final scenes in *Centrifuge.*

Martin Wade didn't answer Nick's knock, but the door was unlocked. Nick entered and crossed to where the aged actor sat by his closed terrace doors.

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Until he saw the wound it never occurred to Nick that anything was amiss. Wade might have been simply resting.

Then he touched the body and saw the stream of blood that had trickled from the gash in Martin Wade's throat, and he realized that someone had murdered his client.

It had never happened to Nick before. No one had ever murdered his client before the assignment had been completed, before the payment had been made. He let his breath out in a slow sigh and looked around the room for some evidence of what had happened. There was no sign of a struggle, no hint of robbery, and it seemed likely that Martin Wade had known his murderer. Nick glanced down at the shopping bag and wondered if he held the motive for the crime in his hand.

He left the building quickly, walking to the nearby lot where he'd parked his rented car. He felt certain now that Wade's murder was linked to the murder of the diamond salesman at the airport. Scalifini's roving camera had somehow caught a clue, perhaps even captured the crime on film. The killer had attempted to fog the film, but when it survived, Nick had been hired to steal it.

But the film was due to be scrapped anyway. Why pay Nick $20,000 when Wade could simply sit back and let it be destroyed? The answer, of course, was obvious. Wade was not the killer, and he didn't want the evidence destroyed. He probably wanted it for blackmail—to cut himself in on a share of the diamonds. When Nick told him he had the film, Wade phoned the killer and made his threat. Perhaps he needed at least a first payment of $20,000 to give Nick. But the person who'd killed once for the diamonds had not hesitated to kill again.

Nick drove to a photographic supply store that was open evenings and rented a Movieola unit. They were easy to come by in Los Angeles, where film editing seemed to be a favorite pastime. Back in his hotel room he threaded the film and turned the crank, watching the gradual unfolding of the scene.

The unit was not equipped for sound, but he knew that the film was silent at this stage anyway—to keep out the extraneous noises of the airport. The dialogue would probably be post-synchronized in the sound-mix lab.

But there seemed no need for dialogue in the scene that unfolded before Nick's eyes. Turning the crank until the

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speed of the film seemed about right, he saw a number of travelers on the long moving sidewalk at the terminal. Some turned their heads toward a commotion in the rear, and after a moment Veronica Blair ran into view, coming toward the camera. Ronnie Hazzard followed, clutching a small suitcase. The foggy quality of the film made viewing difficult, and occasionally Nick stopped turning the crank to study a particular frame in detail.

In one frame a man entered the scene, running after Veronica and Ronnie. He drew a gun, but a fat lady blocked him before he could fire. As the camera dipped almost to the surface of the moving sidewalk, two other men entered, obviously policemen. One was Martin Wade. Then the screen went blank as the reel came to the end.

He ran it through again, searching the crowd for familiar faces or overlooked details, but he found nothing. If any clue existed to the killing of the diamond salesman, it was invisible to Nick. He hid the film in his room, carefully placing it inside the stuffing of a chair, and went down to the lobby for an evening newspaper.

Tucked away on an inside page he found a brief follow-up to the killing of the salesman. He sat down in the lobby to read it: *AIRPORT FILMING MAY HAVE MASKED REAL KILLING. Police believe the robbery slaying of New York jewelry salesman Herbert Swift, 57, who died of a stab wound in the neck while seated in his rented car at Los Angeles International Airport, may have taken place on Friday afternoon during the filming of a movie at the airport. The European director, Abram Scalifini, was completing location shots for his chase thriller, "Centrifuge," inside one of the terminals, and the killer may have used the activity to mask his crime.*

Nick read down a few more paragraphs and was just folding the paper when a voice behind him asked, "Reading about yourself?"

"Hello, Charlie. Are you tailing me?"

Charlie Weston lowered himself into one of the lobby chairs and answered, "No, but it would have been a good idea. I just got word there's been another killing. An old-time actor named Martin Wade killed in his apartment. Stabbed in the neck—same as my diamond salesman."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Wade had a small part in

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the movie they were shooting at the airport. I think the two deaths are connected. And I think you're that connection, Nick."

"You're all wrong."

"I'd like to take a look at your room."

"You'd need a search warrant for that, and since you're private now, I guess you don't have one."

Weston leaned forward in his chair. "I've got you this time, Nick, and you're not going to squirm out of it. The link between Wade and the first killing is the film you stole from Triumph Studios today."

Nick managed to remain expressionless. "What film?"

"A spoiled reel from Friday's shooting that was going to be junked. I went there this afternoon hoping to find a lead. When I asked to see this reel of film, the lab people discovered it was missing. Someone had changed the adhesive strips on the film cans, so that the can labeled *Centrifuge Out-Takes* really held the out-takes of a television special called *Garden Party*. They checked their records and found that a messenger had been sent to pick up the can labeled *Garden Party Out-Takes* earlier this afternoon. I talked to the messenger. He delivered the can to a man named Miller who looked remarkably like you, Nick."

"A nice story."

"A true story. I haven't told it to Scalifini or the others yet, but it's what happened. You stole the film because you were paid to steal it—by the killer of Wade and the salesman."

"No."

"Who did hire you, then? If it wasn't the killer, it had to be Martin Wade."

"I haven't admitted stealing anything."

"You took that film, Nick, and I'm going to see you behind bars this time!"

"You're not a cop any more, Charlie. You don't want me. You want those diamonds and the person who stole them. Right?"

"Right," Weston admitted reluctantly.

"I can get them to you."

"I trust you as far as I can see you, Nick."

"Look, I'll level with you. Martin Wade was my client. But somebody killed him before I could deliver the fogged film. That's all I know."

"What's on the film?"

"Nothing that points to the murder. But if I could watch Scalifini reshoot the scene tomorrow, it might tell me something."

Charlie Weston pondered, his tiny eyes squinting until they almost closed. "I owe you

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nothing, Nick. Not a thing. You've got until tomorrow, but I'm still going to nail you."

"Let's talk about that after I deliver your killer."

"*And* the diamonds."

"*And* the diamonds." Nick grinned.

When Nick walked into the airline terminal the following morning, Scalifini was already busy arranging his lighting and cameras. Walter Robin offered Nick a friendly greeting and a cup of coffee, and Veronica Blair came over to join them.

"Good to see you again," she said. "How's the article coming?"

"Progress. Today's shooting will give me the rest of what I need."

"You heard about Martin Wade?" Robin asked. "Terrible thing!"

Veronica nodded. "Who'd want to kill that poor man?"

Nick watched the extras taking their positions. "Didn't he have a part in this scene?"

"He was one of the detectives," Walter Robin said. "A bit part, like mine."

"Places, everyone!" Scalifini bellowed, glowering at Veronica. When she left Nick and Robin to join Ronnie Hazzard at their position off camera, the beefy director came over to Nick. "We are ready to roll now. It is the same as Friday, so we needn't run through it first."

"Who'll take Wade's part?"

"An extra. It's not important. The other detective has all the dialogue."

Nick watched the action as he'd seen it on the tiny screen of the Movieola. The extras entered and stood on the moving sidewalk, then began turning their heads to the rear as the cameras rolled. Veronica Blair ran forward, followed by Ronnie Hazzard with his suitcase. The man with the gun raised it to fire, but was blocked by Walter Robin and the fat lady. The detectives entered, and then Scalifini yelled, "Cut! Print it!" He added, to the cameraman, "And don't let the lid come off this time!"

There was another camera angle he needed, and while the actors took a break Nick watched one of the girl extras getting coffee for the cast. She spoke briefly to Hazzard and Veronica, then to Walter Robin and the fat lady. Nick saw the extra head in the direction of the coffee machine, but when she reached it she kept on walking. Only casually interested at first, Nick suddenly became alert. The extra was heading for a bank of coin-operated lockers.

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Nick reached her just as she was unlocking the door and dropping another quarter in the slot. "Don't close that."

"What?"

He stepped around her and pulled open the door, revealing a blue zippered flight bag. "I'd like to see what's in there."

"But—but it's not mine. He only asked me to put an extra quarter in the slot before his time ran out."

"Who asked you?"

The girl brushed the dark hair from her eyes and pointed. "Him. Right behind you."

Nick grabbed hold of the flight bag as he turned, ready to hurl it if necessary. But Walter Robin was not armed. He simply stood there, staring at Nick, and asked, "What are you doing? That's my property."

"I'm sure it is, Walter. I have some film I'll trade you for it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you killed two people, Walter, and I've got the film that proves it."

"That film doesn't show a thing." His forehead was moist. "I'm not even in it."

"That's exactly the point. You're *not* in it, and you should have been. When they reshot the scene just now, both you and the fat lady were blocking the gunman's view. But in Friday's version only the fat lady appears. You missed the scene because you were busy elsewhere, killing that diamond salesman."

"Who in hell are you?"

Nick ignored him and hurried on. "You couldn't return to the set with the stolen diamonds, so you hid them in this locker. You knew they wouldn't be disturbed over the weekend, but today you had to put another quarter in before the locker was emptied. You sent this girl in case the police were watching, but when you saw me approach her you had to come into the open."

"What do you want?" Walter Robin muttered. "I'm finished in pictures. I needed the money."

"You needed money badly enough to kill for it?"

"That was an accident."

"Was killing Martin Wade an accident, too, after he told you he had the film and demanded a cut? One broke actor trying to blackmail another? Did he see you open that film can and fog the evidence or did he just notice you were missing from the scene?"

"Take it," Walter Robin said. "Take it all!"

But it was too late for deals. Suddenly Charlie Weston was there, with two detectives. "I'll take that flight bag, Nick."

"You didn't trust me after all, Charlie."

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"I told you—I trust you as far as I can see you."

One of the detectives unzipped the bag and revealed the pouches of tissue-wrapped diamonds.

"I'll have to inventory those," Weston told the man. "And get a receipt for them."

Nick merely grinned. "You're really a company man now, Charlie."

"No deals this time, Nick. You're going to jail, too."

"For what?"

"You stole the film. You tried to make a deal for these diamonds."

Nick sighed and shook his head. "Let's talk, Charlie. Just the two of us."

Weston hesitated, then motioned to the detectives. "Keep your eye on Robin. We'll be over here."

When they were alone Nick said, "Look, Charlie, you've got your diamonds and your killer. You don't need me. Let me walk out of here and I'll tell you how Walter Robin did it. How he knew your salesman was on that plane."

Weston looked blank. "How did he know?"

"Let me catch the next plane east and I'll tell you."

The big man licked his lips. "All right, damn it! But first tell me how Robin walked away from the set in the midst of filming without anyone noticing."

"Maybe that's the sad part of it, Charlie. Maybe that's what turned him into a killer. He walked away and missed his bit part—and nobody noticed. No one except Martin Wade, another broken-down actor."

"He walked away and just happened to bump into the diamond salesman?"

Nick smiled. "You've got it backwards, Charlie. He walked away because he recognized the diamond salesman. You never once called him by name, did you? He was only the diamond salesman to you—a middle-aged guy like Robin and Wade, trying to make a living. He should have been a person to you. He should have had a name. But I had to look in the newspaper to find it."

"What's his name got to do with it?"

"The crime wasn't premeditated, Charlie, don't you see? Walter Robin knew the man. They recognized each other and talked for a while, and I suppose the diamonds in the bag were mentioned. Maybe they talked about old times, when they were partners in a comedy act called *A Couple of Birds*. Then they went out to that rented car, and Walter Robin murdered Herbert Swift."

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a NEW "odd" story by

H. R. F. KEATING

No straight detection this time. No mystery either (except in the sense that there is mystery hidden in every human action and reaction). No crime really (no, that's not entirely true—there is what might be called a "human-interest misdemeanor"). Suspense?—yes, but admittedly only in a mild degree. And yet this story will, we think, fascinate you. The Adventure of the Glace-Fruits Coffin (perhaps that should be its title) has an aura all its own, a heart-snatching quality . . .

MEMORIAL TO SPEKE

by H. R. F. KEATING

The public parks in London open very early in the morning in summertime. But for several hours after the dawn-rising keepers have swung back the gates, the big green open spaces that are one of the chief attractions of the city remain practically deserted. One or two earnest men can be seen hurrying through to jobs that begin before most other Londoners have got out of their beds; some athletic individuals trot round in track suits; and a few hardy dog exercisers stand watching their pets run aimlessly about. But other than these the great parks are empty.

So it was something decidedly out of the ordinary when shortly after 5:00 A.M. one day not so long ago two contrasting figures entered the park called Kensington Gardens, where Barrie's Peter Pan once roamed, by the gate at the southern end of its Broad Walk. One of the two was a small boy, aged about six and looking very British, with his neatly cut fair hair above a pale face and eyes of the intensest gem-hard blue and his overcoat of soft herringbone tweed with a neat velvet collar. He was walking very erectly and carrying a small oblong box about eight inches long by four and a half inches wide.

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The girl beside him was in her early twenties and every inch proclaimed her to be that prime British institution, the Nanny. She wore a gray gabardine coat down to her knees, a gray round felt hat that matched the coat exactly, gray stockings, and neat well-polished black shoes. At ten o'clock in the morning she and the boy would have been a totally unremarkable sight coming into the park from the calmly dignified houses and apartments of Kensington. A boy and his Nanny, no more. But this was not 10:00 A.M.: it was a little after 5:00 in the morning.

To account for the presence of Master Edward Milchester and his Nanny at that hour and in that place we must go back in time a little and consider some not uncomplicated circumstances. Edward was an only child. His father, an executive in an oil company, had by the nature of his work to be abroad a good deal. On many of these trips he took Edward's mother with him, "for the ride," as he put it, and for this reason as much as any, Edward had always had a Nanny.

His first one, who had been with him from babyhood until just after his sixth birthday, finally had had to relinquish her post—a matter of varicose veins doing what the lure of sharing a sister's house at St. Leonards-on-sea had never been able to achieve. The present Nanny had been with the family only six months. This was her first job, but she was recognized to be a sensible girl and Mrs. Milchester had no qualms about leaving her in sole charge of Edward when, about a week earlier, Mr. Milchester had to depart for a fortnight's stay in the United States.

Mrs. Milchester, of course, never quite liked leaving Edward alone with Nanny for so long, and while abroad she always spent a considerable amount of time, and often a considerable amount of money, finding Edward a homecoming present. It might be a monster penknife with eighteen different blades, or, when they went to India, it was a small green parakeet. (There were fearful complications about quarantine, but eventually the present had been successfully handed over.) This time Mrs. Milchester intended to make the gift the very latest American toy, something over which she foresaw no difficulties.

But in the meantime Edward had become very attached to his parakeet, which, since he had been promised that before

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long it would be able to talk, he had named Speak. Speak, in fact, had not learned the art of conversation by as much as a single word, and perhaps it was for this reason that Edward, about two months after he had been given his pet, made a slight change in its name. He was an intelligent boy and was already able not only to read quite well but to spell with some degree of accuracy. So when one day, walking in unfamiliar parts of Kensington Gardens with his new and more athletic Nanny, he came across the simple obelisk that honors the explorer, John Hanning Speke, with its stark engraving saying *In memory of Speke. Victoria Nyanza and the Nile 1864*, he made the small alteration in the bird's name by thinking of it thereafter as Speke. The change increased, if anything, his devotion to his brilliant and beautiful but unloquacious pet.

So imagine the blank and bleak misery that settled down on him when, on the morning that his parents had been in America for just one week, he woke up to find that Speke, in his splendid antique brass cage that hung from a richly ornate stand in the window of his bedroom, was dead. Edward ate no breakfast. He ate no lunch, though Nanny herself rang Harrods and ordered the fresh myrtleberry ice cream that he'd had as a special treat on his last birthday and had frequently since extolled to her. But do what Nanny might—and she was a nice girl who hated to see anyone down in the dumps when there was anything she could do to cheer them up—say what she might, promise what she might, Edward remained inconsolable.

At about six o'clock in the evening, however, when he still had eaten nothing and Nanny was beginning to nerve herself to put through that call to America which she had been tirelessly instructed she should make without hesitation "if anything goes really wrong," the situation suddenly and almost miraculously changed.

Edward, sitting on the red-cushioned window seat in his bedroom, from which he had hardly budged all day, within a few feet of the bright green corpse in its brass cage, abruptly looked up.

"He will have to be given a funeral," he said.

Nanny, quick to sense any change of mood, seized on this possibility of a diversion.

"Oh, yes, of course," she replied briskly. "You can give poor Speke a really nice ceremony. And I've got just the thing that would do for a coffin."

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"What is it?" Edward asked, his voice still tear-stained but his eyes already brighter.

"It's a little wooden box that I had at Christmas. It had glacé fruits in it, and it was so strong and nice I didn't like to throw it away afterwards. But I've been wondering what to do with it."

"Where is it?" Edward demanded.

"Where is it, what, Edward?"

There was a moment of flushed rebelliousness, and then Edward's normal reactions happily took over.

"Where is it, please, Nanny," he said in rapid ritual. "Oh, please, Nanny, where is it?"

"It's in my room. Do you want to come and fetch it?"

And in a few moments Edward had possessed himself of the plain wooden box and was eagerly discussing a suitable lining for it. But all the same there was a bright flush on his cheeks and a brilliance to his gem-blue eyes which Nanny did not altogether like.

So she insisted on him eating the rejected myrtleberry ice cream by way of supper before superintending the lining of some nice white silk inside the box, a sturdy affair about eight inches long and four and a half inches wide. Afterward she watched over the removal of the body of the deceased, with a pair of Eighteenth Century fireplace tongs from the drawing room, from where it had lain all day on the floor of the cage. But she did not see the flush disappear from the boy's cheeks, and as soon as the coffin lid had been lowered into place, she firmly ordered the young moritician to sit down on his bed and took his temperature. It registered one whole degree above normal.

"So it's half an aspirin and bed for you, my lad," she said.

Edward accepted the aspirin without fuss, which in itself was a little disquieting to Nanny, and allowed himself to be undressed and tucked between the sheets almost without a word. Only when he was lying flat with his fair hair spread a little on the pillow did he refer again to the subject that had made such a drama of his day.

"I've thought where the ceremony will take place," he said.

"Oh, yes, dear. Where's that?"

"Speke will be buried under the memorial to him that stands in Kensington Gardens," Edward declared, looking up rigidly at the ceiling high above him.

"Well, I don't think that would really be possible," Nanny said, as she busied

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herself drawing the heavy red brocade drapes.

"But he must be, Nanny. He must be. You said he was to have a Christian burial. You did, you did, you did."

"I said nothing of the sort, my lad, and well you know it. Bury him you certainly can—I'm sure we can find a corner of the garden where Daddy won't want any flowers—but he can't have a Christian burial because animals aren't Christians. They haven't got souls, you know."

Nanny had been taught by nuns and knew her theology. But Edward was far beyond the reach of any such angels-on-the-point-of-a-needle argument.

"Animals do have souls," he shouted back. "They jolly well do. Or anyhow Speke did."

Worried by his vehemence, Nanny tried to brush the matter aside.

"Well, we'll talk about that in the morning," she said. "You go off to sleep now and you'll feel quite different when you wake up."

"I shall still want to bury Speke under his proper monument," Edward replied.

"Now, we'll find somewhere lovely for him in the morning," Nanny answered. "But just you get it out of your head that you can go burying animals where you like in the Royal Parks."

"But he has to be buried in a Royal Park, Nanny," Edward explained with terrible clarity. "His monument's in one."

It was then that Nanny made her mistake. She was not so very experienced after all.

"Digging up the ground in the park," she said. "What would happen if a keeper came along?"

But she had admitted, if only remotely, the possibility. And this, to intense Edward, was the opening of a broad highway.

"We could go when there weren't any keepers about," he began.

"There are always keepers about."

"I bet there aren't. I bet there aren't any when the park opens at five o'clock in the morning."

"How do you know it opens at five o'clock?"

"Because we looked at the notice board. Don't you even remember that? And it said it, five A.M. And that means in the morning. A.M. means morning and P.M. means afternoon."

"Well, that's neither here nor there," Nanny said, with a brisk return to the common-sense world. "I'm not going to let you go burying that bird in the park."

"But, Nanny, you said we could if there weren't any keepers round. And, Nanny,

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there won't be any at five o'clock in the morning, will there? Nanny, I'm going to bury him at five o'clock tomorrow morning. I am. I am. I am. I am."

And then Nanny saw that matters had gone too far. An adamant refusal now would mean a night without sleep. She could see it in the bright fever flush on the pale cheeks, in the sheen of sweat matting the fair hair, and above all in the glittering blue eyes.

"We'll think about the morning when we get to the morning," she said.

For a little Edward lay there, silently claiming his victory. Nanny took a last look round. But she was not quick enough to be out of the room before a voice spoke from the bed again.

"Nanny, will you set your alarm for five o'clock? Will you? Promise?"

So she promised. And when later, after seeing that the still lightly sweating head was safely sleeping on the pillow, she went early to bed herself, worn out with the day's events, she did actually set her little traveling alarm clock for 5:00 A.M.

"Do no harm to see how he is then," she said to herself by way of excuse.

However, long before the alarm was due to ring, an insistent tapping on her shoulder awoke her. Blearily she looked up. The pale light of earliest dawn was coming in at her open window. The hands of her little clock pointed to ten minutes to four. Edward was standing there.

"Nanny, is it five o'clock yet?"

"No, it is not, Edward. Now back you go to bed and off to sleep."

"Yes, Nanny. But you will wake me at five, won't you?"

"All right, yes, if you promise to go to sleep now."

"Yes, I do promise."

And in this way it came about that the small boy in the soft herringbone tweed overcoat with the velvet collar, carrying in front of him a box measuring about eight inches by four and a half, and the girl who was obviously a British Nanny entered Kensington Gardens by the gate at the southern end of the Broad Walk shortly after five o'clock one morning.

The pair of them walked quickly up toward the deserted, wind-flecked Round Pond, followed its edge for a little until they reached a wide grassed avenue of chestnuts, and then set off along its soft turf. They had not seen a soul except one earnest-faced man carrying a red plastic shopping bag and hurrying away toward the north

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side of the park. Some pigeons cooed lazily from the chestnuts and, just at the start of the avenue, a big aspen sighed and sighed, like the sea rattling up the shore, as the morning breeze shook its leaves.

About halfway to the Speke memorial it became visible in the misty morning light, a pale brown spike against the green of grass and trees beyond. Edward quickened his pace.

Then when they were within fifty yards of their objective Nanny thought she saw her salvation. Round the base of the memorial a low black railing loomed.

"We won't be able to get near, Edward," she said. "There's a railing. I'd forgotten that."

"I can climb over," Edward replied, his face set and his eyes never leaving the square needle of the monument.

They reached the end of the avenue. A pigeon crossed in front of them on the asphalt path, walking with a dignified rocking waddle. Nanny saw that, in fact, the railing which consisted only of thick ornamental top and bottom bars presented no obstacle at all. She looked fearfully in all directions. No one was visible.

"Well, get on with it, and quick then," she snapped.

Edward slipped through the railing, knelt on the border of somewhat brown grass surrounding the base of the monument itself, and placed the glacé-fruits coffin reverently down at its exact center. Then he took from his pocket the eighteen-bladed penknife that had been another of his homecoming gifts and with its longest and strongest blade he carved a line on the ground all round the edges of the box; then, setting the box aside, he hacked away at the dried-up turf till he had removed a rectangle the size of the coffin. Next he set to work to scrabble out the powdery earth below.

Nanny, who had been watching with transfixed fascination, suddenly remembered the danger of their situation and looked wildly to either side.

"Edward," she whispered. "Stop! There's a man coming."

Edward looked up from where he was squatting at his task. True enough, there was a man coming, an early-morning athlete, a short spare figure with neat gray hair, a pink complexion, and gold-rimmed glasses, wearing a royal-blue track suit. He was coming along the path toward them at a steady jog trot.

Implacably Edward turned back to his digging. Nanny stood on the path a few yards

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away and waited, unable to move, unable to utter a word.

The regular pad-padding of the runner's sneakers was clear in the morning silence. He came on toward them at that same ominously unvarying pace. Edward dug. Nanny stood. And the runner, obliviously, passed by.

And then at last the work was done. Ceremoniously Edward lowered the little coffin into the hole. He took the gray powdery earth he had removed and dribbled it by handfuls, maddeningly slowly, onto the top of the box. He patted the crumbs down. He replaced the oblong of tangled grass that he had hacked out. Then he pronounced his funeral oration.

"Here lies Speke. He never spoke."

To Nanny's ears the childish voice sounded clarion-loud.

But no one came hurrying up. Edward ducked under the railing and took her hand. Together they set off back down the chestnut avenue toward the Round Pond. Only when they saw the gates at the foot of the Broad Walk again did Edward speak.

"He was a faithful pet," he said.

It was an obituary.

Well, of course, all this is a story—fiction, make-believe, let's pretend, the purest imagination.

But, the thing is, I happened to be going through Kensington Gardens last Sunday and just by that curious spiky memorial to Speke the explorer, I paused a moment to choose which path to take. And there between the railing and the base of the monument I noticed a little oblong of turf that looked deader than the surrounding grass, a papery pale patch. It measured just about eight inches by four and a half inches.

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a NEW DETECTIVE from JAMES HOLDING

Meet Hal Johnson, a new type of detective—at least, a new type in the pages of EQMM. Hal Johnson is library fuzz—he calls himself a "sissy" kind of cop, but he's definitely a cop. What Johnson does is "chase down stolen and overdue books for the public library." Would you believe that in one year a library cop can collect as much as $40,000 in fines and in the value of recovered books? Granted, most of a library cop's special kind of skiptracing is "routine and unexciting"—but every once in a while there is a "Hatfield thing"...

LIBRARY FUZZ

by JAMES HOLDING

It was on the north side in a shabby neighborhood six blocks off the interstate highway—one of those yellow-brick apartment houses that 60 years of grime and weather had turned to a dirty taupe.

The rank of mailboxes inside told me that Hatfield's apartment was Number 35, on the third floor. I walked up. The stairway was littered with candy wrappers, empty beer cans, and a lot of caked-on dirt. It smelled pretty ripe, too.

On the third landing I went over to the door of Apartment 35 and put a finger on the buzzer. I could hear it ring inside the apartment, too loud. I looked down and saw that the door was open half an inch, unlatched, the lock twisted out of shape.

I waited for somebody to answer my ring, but nobody did. So I put an eye to the door crack and looked inside. All I got was a narrow view of a tiny foyer with two doors leading off it, both doors closed. I rang the bell again in case Hatfield hadn't heard it the first time. Still nothing happened.

The uneasiness that had driven me all the way out here

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from the public library was more than uneasiness now. My stomach was churning gently, the way it does when I'm hung over—or scared.

I pushed the door wide-open and said in a tentative voice, "Hello! Anybody home? Mr. Hatfield?"

No answer. I looked at my watch and noted that the time was 9:32. Then I did what I shouldn't have done. I opened the right-hand door that led off Hatfield's foyer into a small poorly furnished living room, and there was Hatfield in front of me.

At least, I assumed it was Hatfield. I'd never met him, so I couldn't be sure. This was a slight balding man with a fringe of gray hair. He was dressed in a neat but shiny blue suit with narrow lapels. I knew the suit's lapels were narrow because one of them was visible to me from where I stood in the doorway. The other was crushed under Hatfield's body which lay sprawled on its side on the threadbare carpet just inside the living-room door.

I sucked in my breath and held it until my stomach settled down a little. Then I stepped around Hatfield's outflung arms to get a better look at him.

There wasn't any blood that I could see. Looked as though he'd fallen while coming into the living room from the foyer. Maybe a heart attack had hit him at just that instant, I thought. It was a possibility. But not a very good one. For when I knelt beside Hatfield and felt for a pulse in his neck, I saw that the left side of his head, the side pressed against the carpet, had been caved in by a massive blow. There was blood, after all, but not much.

I stood up, feeling sick, and looked around the living room. I noticed that the toe of one of Hatfield's black loafers was snagged in a hole in the worn carpet and that a heavy fumed-oak table was perfectly positioned along the left wall of the room to have caught Hatfield's head squarely on its corner as he tripped and fell forward into the room. A quick queasy look at the corner of the table showed me more blood.

Under the edge of the table on the floor, where they must have fallen when Hatfield threw out his arms to catch himself, was a copy of yesterday's evening newspaper and a book from the public library. I could read the title of the book. *The Sound of Singing.*

I thought about that for a moment or two and decided I was pretty much out of my depth here. So I called the police. Which, even to me, seemed a rather odd thing to

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do—because I'm a cop myself.

A "sissy kind" of a cop, it's true, but definitely a cop. And it isn't a bad job. For one thing, I don't have to carry a gun. My arrests are usually made without much fuss and never with any violence. I get a fair salary if you consider ten thousand a year a fair salary. And nobody calls me a pig, even though I am fuzz.

Library fuzz. What I do is chase down stolen and overdue books for the public library. Most of my work is routine and unexciting—but every once in a while I run into something that adds pepper to an otherwise bland diet.

Like this Hatfield thing.

The day before I found Hatfield's body had started off for me like any other Monday. I had a list of names and addresses to call on. Understand, the library sends out notices to book borrowers when their books are overdue; but some people are deadbeats, some are book lovers, and some are so absent-minded that they ignore the notices and hang onto the books. It's these hard-core overdues that I call on—to get the books back for the library and collect the fines owing on them.

Yesterday the first name on my list was Mrs. William Conway at an address on Sanford Street. I parked my car in the driveway of the small Cape Cod house that had the name "Conway" on its mailbox and went up to the front door and rang the bell.

The woman who answered the door wasn't the maid, because she was dressed in a sexy nightie with a lacy robe of some sort thrown over it, and she gave me a warm, spontaneous, friendly smile before she even knew who I was. She was medium-tall in her pink bedroom slippers and had very dark hair, caught back in a ponytail by a blue ribbon, and china-blue eyes that looked almost startling under her dark eyebrows. I also noticed that she was exceptionally well put together.

What a nice way to start the day, I thought to myself. I said, "Are you Mrs. Conway?"

"Yes," she said, giving me a straight untroubled look with those blue eyes.

"I'm from the public library. I've come about those overdue books you have." I showed her my identification card.

"Oh, my goodness!" she said, and her look of inquiry turned to one of stricken guilt. "Oh, yes. Come in, won't you, Mr. Johnson? I'm really embarrassed about those books. I know I should have returned

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them a long time ago—I got the notices, of course. But honestly, I've been so busy!" She stepped back in mild confusion and I went into her house.

It turned out to be as unpretentious as it had looked from outside. In fact, the furnishings displayed an almost spectacular lack of taste. Well, nobody is perfect, I reminded myself. I could easily forgive Mrs. Conway's manifest ignorance of decorating principles, since she was so very decorative herself.

She switched off a color TV set that was muttering in one corner of the living room and motioned me to a chair. "Won't you sit down?" she said tentatively. She wasn't sure just how she ought to treat a library cop.

I said politely, "No, thanks. If you'll just give me your overdue books and the fines you owe, I'll be on my way."

She made a little rush for a coffee table across the room, the hem of her robe swishing after her. "I have the books right here." She scooped up a pile of books from the table. "I have them all ready to bring back to the library, you see?"

While I checked the book titles against my list I asked, "Why didn't you bring them back, Mrs. Conway?"

"My sister's been in the hospital," she explained, "and I've been spending every free minute with her. I just sort of forgot about my library books. I'm sorry."

"No harm done." I told her how much the fines amounted to and she made another little rush, this time for her purse which hung by its strap from the back of a Windsor chair. "The books seem to be all here," I went on, "except one."

"Oh, is one missing? Which one?"

"*The Sound of Singing*."

"That was a wonderful story!" Mrs. Conway said enthusiastically. "Did you read it?" She sent her blue eyes around the room, searching for the missing book.

"No. But everybody seems to like it. Maybe your husband or one of the kids took it to read," I suggested.

She gave a trill of laughter. "I haven't any children, and my husband"—she gestured toward a photograph of him on her desk, a dapper, youngish-looking man with a mustache and not much chin—"is far too busy practicing law to find time to read light novels." She paused then, plainly puzzled.

I said gently, "How about having a look in the other rooms, Mrs. Conway?"

"Of course." She counted out the money for her fines and

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then went rushing away up the carpeted stairs to the second floor. I watched her all the way up. It was a pleasure to look at her.

In a minute she reappeared with the missing book clutched against her chest. "Ralph *did* take it!" she said breathlessly. "Imagine! He must have started to read it last night while I was out. It was on his bedside table under the telephone." She handed me the book.

"Good," I said. I took the book by its covers, pages down, and shook it—standard procedure to see if anything had been left between the pages by the borrower. You'd be surprised at what some people use to mark their places.

"I'm terribly sorry to have caused so much trouble," Mrs. Conway said. And I knew she meant it.

I had no excuse to linger, so I took the books under my arm, said goodbye, and left, fixing Mrs. Conway's lovely face in my memory alongside certain other pretty pictures I keep there to cheer me up on my low days.

I ticked off the last name on my list about one o'clock. By that time the back seat of my car was full of overdue books and my back pocket full of money for the library. Those few-cents-a-day book fines add up to a tidy sum when you put them all together, you know that? Would you believe that last year, all by myself, I collected $40,000 in fines and in the value of recovered books?

I went back to the library to turn in my day's pickings and to grab a quick lunch at the library cafeteria. About two o'clock the telephone in my closet-sized office rang and when I answered, the switchboard girl told me there was a lady in the lobby who was asking to see me.

That surprised me. I don't get many lady visitors at the office. And the lady herself surprised me, too. She turned out to be my blue-eyed brunette of the morning, Mrs. William Conway—but a Mrs. Conway who looked as though she'd been hit in the face by a truck since I'd seen her last.

There was a bruise as big as a half dollar on one cheek, a deep scratch on her forehead; an ugly knotted lump interrupted the smooth line of her jaw on the left side; and the flesh around one of her startling blue eyes was puffed and faintly discolored. Although she had evidently been at pains to disguise these marks with heavy make-up, they still showed. Plainly.

I suppose she saw from my expression that I'd noticed her

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bruises because as she sat down in my only office chair, she dropped her eyes and flushed and said with a crooked smile, "Do I look *that* bad, Mr. Johnson?" It was a singularly beguiling gambit. Actually, battered face and all, I thought she looked just as attractive now in a lemon-colored pants suit as she had in her nightie and robe that morning.

I said, "You look fine, Mrs. Conway."

She tried to sound indignant. "I fell down our stupid stairs! Can you imagine that? Just after you left. I finished making the beds and was coming down for coffee when—zap!—head over heels clear to the bottom!"

"Bad luck," I said sympathetically, reflecting that a fall down her thickly carpeted stairs would be most unlikely to result in injuries like hers. But it was none of my business.

She said, "What I came about, Mr. Johnson, was to see if I could get back *The Sound of Singing* you took this morning. My husband was furious when he came home for lunch and found I'd given it back to you."

"No problem there. We must have a dozen copies of that book in—"

She interrupted me. "Oh, but I was hoping to get the same copy I had before. You see, my husband says he left a check in it—quite a big one from a client."

"Oh. Then I must have missed it when I shook out the book this morning."

She nodded. "You must have. Ralph is sure he left it there." Mrs. Conway put a fingertip to the lump on her jaw and then hastily dropped her hand into her lap when she saw me watching her.

"Well," I said, "I've already turned the book back to the shelves, Mrs. Conway, but if we're lucky it'll still be in. Let me check." I picked up my phone and asked for the librarian on the checkout desk.

Consulting my morning list of overdue book numbers, now all safely returned to circulation, I said, "Liz, have you checked out number 15208, *The Sound of Singing*, to anybody in the last hour?"

"I've checked out that title but I don't know if it was that copy. Just a second," Liz said. After half a minute she said, "Yes, here it is, Hal. It went out half an hour ago on card number PC28382."

I made a note on my desk pad of that card number, repeating the digits out loud as I did so. Then, thanking Liz, I hung up and told Mrs. Conway, "I'm sorry, your copy's gone out again."

"Oh, dammit anyway!" said

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Mrs. Conway passionately. I gathered this was pretty strong talk for her because she blushed again and threw me a distressed look before continuing, "*Everything* seems to be going wrong for me today!" She paused. "What was that number you just took down, Mr. Johnson? Does that tell who's got the book now?"

"It tells *me*," I answered. "But for a lot of reasons we're not allowed to tell *you*. It's the card number of the person who borrowed the book."

"Oh, dear," she said, chewing miserably on her lower lip, "then that's *more* bad luck, isn't it?"

I was tempted to break the library's rigid rule and give her the name and address she wanted. However, there were a couple of things besides the rule that made me restrain my chivalrous impulse. Such as no check dropping out of *The Sound of Singing* this morning when I shook the book. And such as Mrs. Conway's bruises, which looked to me more like the work of fists than of carpeted stairs.

So I said, "I'll be glad to telephone whoever has the book now and ask him about your husband's check. Or her. If the check *is* in the book, they'll probably be glad to mail it to you."

"Oh, would you, Mr. Johnson? That would be wonderful!" Her eyes lit up at once.

I called the library's main desk where they issue cards and keep the register of card holders' names and addresses. "This is Hal Johnson," I said. "Look up the holder of card number PC28382 for me, will you, Kathy?"

I waited until she gave me a name—George Hatfield—and an address on the north side, then hung up, found Hatfield's telephone number in the directory, and dialed it on an outside line, feeling a little self-conscious under the anxious scrutiny of Mrs. Conway's beautiful bruised blue eye.

Nobody answered the Hatfield phone.

Mrs. Conway sighed when I shook my head. "I'll try again in an hour or so. Probably not home yet. And when I get him I'll ask him to mail the check to you. I have your address. Okay?"

She stood up and gave me a forlorn nod. "I guess that's the best I can do. I'll tell Ralph you're trying to get his check back, anyhow. Thanks very much." She was still chewing on her lower lip when she left.

Later in the afternoon she called me to tell me that her husband Ralph had found his missing check in a drawer at

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home. There was vast relief in her voice when she told me. I wasn't relieved so much as angry—because it seemed likely to me that my beautiful Mrs. Conway had been slapped around pretty savagely by that little jerk in her photograph for a mistake she hadn't made.

Anyway, I forgot about *The Sound of Singing* and spent the rest of the afternoon shopping for a new set of belted tires for my old car.

Next morning, a few minutes before 9:00, I stopped by the library to turn in my expense voucher for the new tires and pick up my list of overdues for the day's calls. As I passed the main desk, Kathy, who was just settling down for her day's work, said, "Hi, Hal. Stop a minute and let me see if it shows."

I paused by the desk. "See if what shows?"

"Senility."

"Of course it shows, child. I'm almost forty. Why this sudden interest?"

"Only the onset of senility can account for *you* forgetting something," Kathy said. "The man with the famous memory."

I was mystified. "What did I forget?"

"The name and address of card holder PC28382, that's what. You called me to look it up for you not long after lunch yesterday, remember?"

"Sure. So what makes you think I forgot it?"

"You said you had when you called me again at four thirty for the same information."

I stared at her. "Me?"

She nodded. "You."

"I didn't call you at four thirty."

"Somebody did. And said he was you."

"Did it sound like my voice?"

"Certainly. An ordinary, uninteresting man's voice. Just like yours." She grinned at me.

"Thanks. Somebody playing a joke, maybe. It wasn't me."

While I was turning in my voucher and picking up my list of overdues I kept thinking about Kathy's second telephone call. The more I thought about it, the more it bothered me.

So I decided to make my first call of the day on George Hatfield . . .

Well, I didn't touch anything in Hatfield's apartment until the law showed up in the persons of a uniformed patrolman and an old friend of mine, Lieutenant Randall of Homicide. I'd worked with Randall when I was in the detective bureau myself a few years back.

Randall looked at the setup in Hatfield's living room and

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growled at me, "Why me, Hal? All you need is an ambulance on this one. The guy's had a fatal accident, that's all."

So I told him about Mrs. Conway and her husband and *The Sound of Singing* and the mysterious telephone call to Kathy at the library. When I finished he jerked his head toward the library book lying under Hatfield's table and said, "Is that it?"

"I haven't looked yet. I was waiting for you."

"Look now," Randall said.

It was book number 15208, all right—unmistakably the one I'd collected yesterday from Mrs. Conway. Its identification number appeared big and clear in both the usual places—on the front flyleaf and on the margin of page 101. "This is it. No mistake," I said.

"If Hatfield's killing is connected with this book, as you seem to think," Randall said reasonably enough, "there's got to be something about the book to tell us why."

I said, "Maybe there was. Before the back flyleaf was torn out."

"Be damned!" said Randall, squinting where I was pointing. "Torn out is right. Something written on the flyleaf that this Conway wanted kept private maybe?"

"Could be."

"Thought you said you looked through this book yesterday. You'd have seen any writing."

"I didn't look through it. I shook it out, that's all."

"Why would a guy write anything private or incriminating on the blank back page of a library book, for God's sake?"

"His wife found the book under the telephone in their bedroom. He could have been taking down notes during a telephone conversation."

"In a library book?"

"Why not? If it was the only blank paper he had handy when he got the telephone call?"

"So his wife gave the book back to you before he'd had a chance to erase his notes. Is that what you're suggesting?"

"Or transcribe them, yes. Or memorize them."

Lieutenant Randall looked out Hatfield's grimy window for a moment. Then he said abruptly, "I'm impounding this library book for a few days, Hal, so our lab boys can take a look at it. Okay?"

"Okay."

Randall glanced pointedly toward the door. "Thanks for calling us," he said. "Be seeing you."

I stepped carefully around Hatfield's sprawled body. "Right."

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"I'll be in touch if we find anything," Randall said.

Much to my surprise he phoned me at the library just about quitting time the next day. "Did you ever see this Mr. Conway?" he asked. "Could you identify him?"

"I never saw him in the flesh. I saw a photo of him on his wife's desk."

"That's good enough. Meet me at the Encore Bar at Stanhope and Cotton in twenty minutes, can you?"

"Sure," I said. "Why?"

"Tell you when I see you."

He was waiting for me in a rear booth. There were only half a dozen customers in the place. I sat down facing him and he said, without preamble, "Conway *did* write something on the back flyleaf of your library book. Or somebody did, anyhow. Because we found traces of crushed paper fibers on the page *under* the back flyleaf. Not good enough traces to be read except for one notation at the top, which was probably written first on the back flyleaf when the pencil point was sharper and thus made a deeper groove on the page underneath. Are you with me?"

"Yes. What did it say?"

Randall got a slip of paper from his pocket and showed it to me. It contained one line, scribbled by Randall:

Transo 3212/5/13 Mi
—Encore Harper 6/12

I studied it silently for a minute. Randall said, faintly smug, "Does that mean anything to you?"

"Sure," I said, deadpan. "Somebody named Harper off Transoceanic Airlines flight 3212 out of Miami on May 13th—that's today—is supposed to meet somebody in this bar at twelve minutes after six."

"A lucky guess," Randall said, crestfallen. "The *Encore* and *Transo* gave it to you, of course. But it took us half an hour to figure the meaning and check it out."

"Check it out?"

"There really *is* a Transoceanic flight 3212 out of Miami today—and there really is somebody aboard named Harper, too. A Miss Genevieve Harper, stewardess."

"Oh," I said, "and of course there *is* an Encore Bar—could even be a couple of them in town."

"Only one that Harper can get to through rush-hour traffic within twenty minutes after she hits the airport," the lieutenant said triumphantly. "She's scheduled in at 5:52."

I glanced at my watch. It

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was 5:30. "You have time to check whether Conway had any phone calls Sunday night?"

"Not yet. Didn't even have time to find out what Conway looks like. That's why you're here." He grinned. "What's your guess about why they're meeting here?"

I gave it some thought. "Drugs," I said at last, "since the flight seems to be out of Miami. Most of the heroin processed in France comes to the United States via South America and Miami, right?"

Randall nodded. "We figure Conway for a distributor at this end. Sunday night he got a phone call from somebody in South America or Miami, telling him when and where to take delivery of a shipment. That's what he wrote on the flyleaf of your library book. So no wonder he was frantic when his wife gave his list of dates and places to a library cop."

I suddenly felt tired. I called over to the bartender and ordered a dry martini. I said to Randall, "So Hatfield's accident could have been murder?"

"Sure. We think it went like this: Mrs. Conway gave you the book, got knocked around by her husband when she told him what she'd done, then on hubby's orders came to you to recover the book for him. When she couldn't do that, or even get the name of the subsequent borrower, her husband did the best he could with the information she *did* get—the borrower's library card number and how you matched it up with his name and address. Conway got the name the same way you did—by phoning what's-her-name at your main desk."

"Kathy," I said.

"Yeah. Conway must have gone right out to Hatfield's when he learned his identity, prepared to do anything necessary to get that book back—or his list on the flyleaf, anyway." Randall nodded approval of his own theory. "Conway broke the lock on Hatfield's apartment and was inside looking for the book when Hatfield must have walked in on him."

"And Conway hid behind the door and clobbered Hatfield when he walked in?"

"Yeah. Probably with a blackjack. And probably, in his panic, hit him too hard. So he faked it to look like an accident. Then he tore the back flyleaf out of your book thinking nobody would ever notice it was missing."

"You forgot something," I said.

"What?"

"He made his wife call me off by telling me he'd found his lost check."

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"I didn't forget it," Randall grinned.

I said, "Of course you can't prove any of this."

"Not yet. But give us time. We get him on a narcotics charge and hold him tighter than hell while we work up the murder case."

"*If* it's Conway," I said, looking at my watch, "who shows up here in twenty-two minutes."

"He'll show." Randall was confident. "Likely get here a little early, even."

And he did. At 5:56 the original of Mrs. Conway's photograph walked in the door of the Encore Bar. Dapper, young-looking, not much chin under a mustache that drooped around the corners of his mouth.

He sat down in the booth nearest the door and ordered a Scotch-and-soda.

Randall threw me a questioning look and I nodded vigorously. Then we talked about baseball until, at 6:14, a bouncy little blonde dish came tripping into the Encore and went straight to Conway's booth, saying loud enough for everybody in the joint to hear, "Well, hello, darling! I'm so thirsty I could drink *water!*" She looked very pert in her uniform and she had a flight bag over her shoulder. She sat down beside Conway with her back to us.

Randall got up, went to the bar entrance, and opened the door. He stepped out into the vestibule and casually waved one arm over his head, as though he were tossing a cigarette butt away. Then he came back in and leaned against the bar until three young huskies appeared in the doorway. Randall pointed one finger at Conway's booth and the three newcomers stepped over there, boxing in Conway and Miss Harper.

It was all done very quietly and smoothly. No voices raised, no violence. One of the narcotics men took charge of Harper's shoulder bag. The other two took charge of Conway and Harper.

When they'd gone, Randall ordered himself a bourbon and carried it back to our booth and sat down. "That's it, Hal," he said with satisfaction. "Harper had two one-pound boxes of bath powder in her flight bag. Pure heroin. This is going to look very good—*very* good—on my record."

I took a sip of my martini and said nothing.

Randall went on, "You're sure Conway's wife has nothing to do with the smuggling? That she doesn't suspect what her hubby is up to?"

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I thought about Mrs. Conway's friendliness, so charming and unstudied. I remembered how the animation and pride I'd seen in her eyes yesterday morning had been replaced by distress and bewilderment in the afternoon. And I said to Lieutenant Randall, "I'd stake my job on it."

He nodded. "We'll have to dig into it, of course. But I'm inclined to think you're right. So somebody ought to tell her why her husband won't be home for dinner tonight, Hal." He paused for a long moment. "Any volunteers?"

I looked up from my martini into Randall's unblinking stare. "Thanks, Lieutenant," I said. "I'm on my way."

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	PRICE	ON SALE
Angus, Sylvia	ARSON AND OLD LACE	World Publishing	$5.95	10/26
Delman, David	SUDDEN DEATH	Doubleday & Co.	4.95	10/20
Devine, Dominic	THREE GREEN BOTTLES	Doubleday & Co.	4.95	10/13
Haggard, William	THE PROTECTORS	Walker & Co.	5.95	10/18
Lynn, Margaret	SWEET EPITAPH	Doubleday & Co.	4.95	10/6
McCutcheon, Hugh	RED SKY AT NIGHT	Walker & Co.	4.95	10/2

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Lika Van Ness's first story, "Mr. Anonymous," appeared in the January 1972 issue of EQMM. It was, you may recall, subtle and tantalizing. Her second story, "Something Like Growing Pains," shows a considerable advance, both in technique and telling. But even more important is the deeper substance of what the author has to say—a lesson in anatomy, the surgical probing of a contemporary marriage . . .

SOMETHING LIKE GROWING PAINS

by LIKA VAN NESS

Ralph Boalt came in from putting the car away and found his wife weaving back and forth on her toes, looking through the still unfamiliar kitchen cupboard. "What are you doing?" he inquired, locking the door.

"I'm looking for something to wash this sand out of my mouth."

"Water's good," he suggested, shutting both kitchen windows against the raw sea air and turning to face her. "You look like a sand sculpture. Why don't you go take a bath?"

Outside, the surf splashed methodically, one hefty sigh following fast on another. "Come on," Ralph said, going to the bathroom off the kitchen and turning the squeaky faucets in the tub. "Get the sand off and I'll make you a fire and that silly rum and grapefruit drink you like."

"Is there any juice left?" Harriet opened the refrigerator door and peered in, rubbing a lock of sand-encrusted brown hair between her fingers. A large can of unsweetened grapefruit juice stood between the bottle of milk and a pickle jar containing one dill pickle sunk in pale green water. She removed the can of juice and shook it.

"What gets into you at these parties down here?" Ralph called, a deceptive, amused-

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sounding note in his voice. "You were all over that beach tonight like the sand was stardust. Not that you'll remember it tomorrow."

"I'll remember it," she assured him.

"You'd think you'd remember your first swim in two years, but you don't."

He was referring to the swim she had taken on Sunday with all her clothes on. Harriet ran her finger thoughtfully over a long dark cigarette scar she had already made on the pine-board countertop, then walked to the bathroom, stepping out of her sandals on the way.

Ralph was down on one knee, testing the water with one hand and adjusting the faucets with the other. "You thought you were Esther Williams, for God's sake," he was saying.

"Are you preparing me a bath," she asked quietly, "or a lecture?"

"Have you got a fresh change?" He dropped a bar of soap and a drying, balled-up facecloth into the water.

"My nightgown is on the back of the bedroom door."

He wheeled the faucets shut, slapped the water, and wiped his hands on a worn towel on the rack. "There you go," he said, leaving her.

She heard him climb the wooden stairs as she shut the door and got out of her scratchy clothes. Stepping into the shallow tepid water and sitting, she frowned as he started to whistle overhead and she wondered why the things she had loved five years before, like his whistling and his good posture and careful manners, drove her wild now.

Shutting her eyes, she sank back, letting the water soak off the sand. She ran her tongue over her teeth, still gritty with sand, stopping at her broken front tooth. She hadn't really stopped being self-conscious about the tooth since she had broken it in a stupid fall after a high-school football game, but she had never had it capped, she didn't know why.

The door opened and Ralph set the pink gown, neatly folded, on the john lid by her head. She quickly closed her eyes again, but he did not leave. He fished for and found the washcloth and knelt by the tub. She sat up and pulled the cloth out of his hand.

"Go away," she said. He stood and wiped his hand on his corduroy trousers, his face taking on the arrogant expression he used to recoup his dignity, and then left, shutting the door behind him.

"All right," he called in later. "What's keeping you?"

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She was sitting with her head forward, her forehead resting on her knees. The room was cold. "I'm coming."

"Hurry up. You'll catch cold."

The sand on the bottom of the tub was sharp. "All right."

"Don't forget your hair."

"All *right*."

When she joined him in the living room she was wet under the pink cotton gown and her hair was slicked back and dripping down her collar. He gave it a disapproving glance.

"You told me to soak my head and I did," she explained.

"Have you ever heard of a towel? Your drink's there." He gestured from the flowered sofa where he lay with a glass of whiskey and soda on his chest.

"This?" She lifted a tall glass off the pile of newspapers on the hassock.

"What's wrong with it?"

"It should be pink."

"I can't help that. You told me equal parts applejack and juice. Does it have to be pink grapefruit or something?"

"Grenadine makes it pink, it's got nothing to do with the grapefruit."

"What possible difference can the color make?"

"It's not just to make it pink—it's for flavor. It makes a big difference in the taste." She went to the kitchen, remembering there was no grenadine but pretending to look. In the living room Ralph sang, " 'And He walks with me and He talks with me—' "

" 'Oh, the Bowery, the Bowery,' " Harriet finished, " 'I'll never go there any more.' " She returned to the living room and stretched across the armchair opposite him, swinging her legs over the frayed sailcloth-covered arm so that she too was facing the fire. "No grenadine," she said, lifting her glass. "Here's mud in your eye."

"Here's to the kids," he returned solemnly.

"To the kids. Long may they wave goodbye to us as we leave for vacation."

"You haven't missed them for a second, have you?" Ralph said.

"I've missed them all right, don't you worry. I don't *ache* for them. When I start to ache I remind myself how fond Ronnie's grown of whining and Barbara can't ever stop and think once before she does anything. I think of the sleepless mornings and the squalor and I know I can survive to the end of the week without too much pain."

"If your life strikes you as squalid don't blame them. You've got the time to teach them manners without any

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interference from me. I'm on the road five days a week, I'm no distraction."

"You're no *help* either."

"What do you want me to do, find a job in the office? At half the salary?"

"I want you to stop trying to make me feel guilty about enjoying a vacation away from them just because you think *you* should feel guilty because you're *always* away from them." An honest talk can't hurt, she told herself, wanting to run but taking a drink instead.

"You're as truthful with yourself as you've always been," he said, throwing her a quick sinister smile.

"Truth? What's that?" she said lightly, scared, deciding honest talks did hurt. When her friend Bunny's marriage was at the breaking point, Harriet had insisted that if Bunny would only talk it out with Art it would be all right. Communication was the answer. But Art didn't have a hot-potato smile like Ralph's to scare the hell out of Bunny, that was a big difference. "This is nice," she said, changing her tone. "I should build more fires at home."

"I forbid you to build any fires at home when I'm not there. Just keep your fires confined to the inner woman, please." Forty feet away, outside the window, the tide beat the shore. "I for*bid* you to build a fire in my absence."

"I was a Girl Scout. First-class."

"You'd leave the damper closed or forget to put back the screen or some fool thing. No fires."

"You're a fine one to forbid," she said, lighting a cigarette. "Who left the bottle of gin on the stove last night?"

"*You* did, for God's sake!"

"*I* did! Who was sitting on that very *soda—sofa*—drinking from that same bottle of gin when I went up to bed?"

"I was. Who got up later in the night after I was in bed and came down for a nip?"

"I came down once, to the *john*. I didn't see that bottle again until I got up this morning, *hours* before you did, and there it was, smack on the open pilot. If I hadn't thought fast and grabbed a pot holder, I might have burned my hand off. We're lucky it didn't explode."

He swung his feet to the floor and went purposefully to the kitchen, returning with an almost empty bottle of gin. "How come when I went up to bed this bottle was more than half full?"

"Have you ever heard of evaporation?"

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"I don't buy that."

"Will you buy the possibility that you could be mistaken about how much you left?"

"I'm sold on the fact that you left it on the stove. I put it on the counter here when I went to bed."

"You're a dream," she said softly into the fireplace.

He slammed the bottle down on the table near the porch door and threw himself back down on the sofa.

"I myself—" she began.

"I *myself*," he repeated scornfully.

"I myself *personally* say it was an accident, no harm done, let's forget it."

"Easy for *you*," he told the ceiling.

Why did I marry him? she asked herself, taking more of the drink and regarding him across the woven-straw rug. His mouth was a dry line and the planes of his nose were hard and sharp even in the artificial light. Why did *he* marry *me*? What made us think we could be happy?

They had left home early Saturday morning in the company car, leaving the children with Harriet's mother, who had convinced them they needed a vacation by themselves in a rented cottage on the Connecticut shore, where they had friends. Ralph had insisted on driving the whole way, declaring, "*No*body's got that much insurance" when she asked to take the wheel.

The drive had been the best part of the vacation—the only good part, in fact—the lush green country leading to the shoreline, the blood-red barns and antique shops and the proud little restaurant where they had stopped for lunch.

For a few brief hours she had thought that her mother was right and that the vacation might be the answer to the last few demoralizing years. But they had done nothing but drink and fight since the Longmires' beer party on Saturday night. Their arrival there, and seeing Steve and Judy Longmire and other old friends jubilant and tanned, was the last good moment she could recall. They had stayed until the party went dry and on Sunday had got straight out of bed and gone to another party, a clambake on the beach, very little of which (including her first swim in two years) she could remember . . .

"Do you think you're a better person for this marriage?" Ralph asked.

"I'm not a compulsive cleaner any more."

"That's only because you'd rather booze with the neighbors than stay home and clean, it has

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nothing to do with me, or the children."

"I only drink with you."

"That's a feeble lie."

"I'm sorry you think so."

"*Some*thing's occupying your time besides the children. Or some*body*."

"I'm not a kaffee-klatscher."

"I believe you."

She drew herself up straighter to look at him, the applejack doing its work at the pit of her stomach. "Let's not start with the really damaging words now, please."

"No, but what can I believe? Yours is a deceitful nature."

She ignored his meaning. "You've got a nerve. The gay deceiver himself."

"Are we coming to Grace Ordway?"

"You lead the way every time."

"I might deceive you but Grace Ordway wouldn't."

"There's only one thing honest about Grace Ordway and that's her being so honestly ugly. In that department she's very honest."

"She has beautiful teeth."

"So you've said. You've also said she is a quote salty gal unquote."

"I was entitled to Grace Ordway."

"I used to think I was something of a salty girl myself."

"*I was entitled to Grace Ordway!*"

"Go to heaven."

"When a man finds his wife was committed to a mental institution before she married him and didn't think to mention it, he's got a right to react when he finds out."

"I was an outpatient. Just a little crackers for a short time. Something like growing pains, the doctor said."

"You're on the records for extensive psychotherapy, that's all I know. Plus two shock treatments."

A wide blue flame wrapped itself around the front log. The room was warm and the slipcover wet from her hair. She drained her glass, forbidding herself to cry. "You may recall—" She reached down and returned the empty glass to the floor. "You may recall a conversation before we were married in which you explained to me the wisdom of two people keeping certain aspects of their past a secret."

"A mental breakdown wasn't the kind of thing I meant."

"How did I know you were protecting yourself from your raunchy past?"

He went to the fireplace, moved the screen to the side, and stoked the fire.

"Let it die," she said.

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He continued to prod the logs, creating sparks. "I wish I could forget it," he said finally, "but I can't."

"You can though," she insisted; "if you don't make a memorandum of it."

He replaced the poker and the screen and brought his empty glass to the kitchen, leaving behind an offensive smell of perspiration, like scalded chicken soup. Harriet sat watching the flame flick shadows on the walls and furniture, hearing the ocean play its steady rhythm against the beach.

"Are you going to bed?" she asked as he started back through the room toward the stairs.

"What does it look like?"

"I didn't hear you brush your teeth."

He started up the stairs.

"Is it such a crime that I was sick, Ralph?"

"I couldn't have cared less that you were sick," he answered, out of sight, his climbing a tired scrape on the uncarpeted stairs. "The crime is that you didn't tell me."

"*Why?*"

It was a whisper she decided he hadn't heard when finally he answered from the top of the dark stairwell.

"Because you didn't trust me to understand, you destructive, insensitive foul-up of a broad, how many times do I have to tell you?"

She heard him undress, shut the bedroom window, and climb into the creaking bed. Her empty glass was a disappointment but she resolved not to mix another drink. The ship's-bell clock on the mantel chimed eleven. Crossing to the sofa she plumped up the dry pillows and lay on her side, breathing the fragrant woodsmoke and wondering where the sweet peace of sleeping with Ralph had gone.

The clock sounding midnight roused her and she sat up, her head aching loosely. She walked stiffly to the bathroom for an aspirin and washed her face, noticing as she did that her nightgown was inside out. She took it off, turned it right side out, and slipped it on again. She took a second aspirin and sprayed the mud out of the bottom of the tub down the drain. In the kitchen she rinsed the glasses, filled the ice-cube tray, and put out the light.

Back in the living room she knelt on the sofa, holding the curtain aside to look out. It was too dark to see the surf and she rose and unbolted the door, walking out onto the sandy porch and down the stairs in her bare feet.

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Billions of stars swept in brilliant arcs through the black sky. The air was spicy with smoke from the chimneys along the beach. Lowering herself onto the steps she sat facing the sea, the breeze stirring the still-damp ends of her hair.

Her mother hadn't liked or trusted Ralph and had fought the idea of her marrying him. But once convinced the marriage was inevitable, she had made Harriet promise not to tell him about the breakdown, persuading her that he would plague her with it afterward whenever they quarreled and that eventually it would ruin the marriage.

Would he have done that if he had known from the start? Harriet's head ached as she climbed back up the porch stairs and went inside, locking the door behind her. She would never know.

Except for the sigh of the ocean, Ralph's light snoring from upstairs, and the mouse-like sounds in the fireplace the cottage was very quiet. The almost empty bottle of gin on the table caught her eye and she brought it to the darkened kitchen, draining it on the way. Placing it on top of the trash barrel by the sink, she then walked with interest to the stove.

In the small hole in the center of the stove the tiny flame of the pilot light burned steadily. Harriet turned on the gas under each of the four burners, slowly, one at a time, then lit all four, increasing and diminishing the intensity of their flames before extinguishing them again.

She went to the narrow linen closet by the bathroom door and felt around the upper shelves for the two army blankets they had brought with them for the beach. Leaving one on a chair by the table, she placed the other across the floor by the back door, pushing its thickness snugly against the threshold. She checked the windows to make sure they were fully shut and returned to the stove where she blew out the pilot light on the top of the stove and then the second one inside the oven. Finally, turning all the gas jets full twist, she moved to the living room, sensing the whisper of the escaping gas behind her, and tucked the second blanket neatly against the floor by the porch door.

There was an old *Life* on the table she didn't remember having seen and she browsed through it standing, dusting sand from one foot with the sole of the other. Then she flipped the last page and stood a while, absently patting her

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hair, which was now completely dry, before starting for the stairs.

Halfway across the room she hesitated a few seconds longer to stare at the embers, touching the lukewarm screen with her fingers. She wished she could have built more fires for the children. Well, they would be all right. They could remain with her mother. Her mother was still young. They would be no better and no worse off with her.

With a last look at the small sealed-off room she started up to the bedroom and her sleeping husband, who would probably, as was his habit these days, turn his back to her when she climbed in beside him.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Yes, something has been achieved. Our dateline is November, and we are within one month of summing up at the end, before lack of worthy new detection compels a choice among masterpieces from the past. Though it will be buttressed by three new adventure-thrillers this masterpiece first saw the light more than fifty years ago. Let's salute the short-story wizardry of Melville Davisson Post, lawyer-philosopher-criminologist, whose death in 1930 ended a writing career both brilliant and popularly successful.

Before the turn of the century Post had invented his Messianic lawyer, Randolph Mason. Ah, these Masons! But his best-known book, *Uncle Abner, Master of Mysteries*, was published by Appleton in 1918. Against a background of the Virginia which became West Virginia during the Great Conflict, it features Uncle Abner, that stern mountain man, in eighteen detective tales as terse as they are powerfully written, each with a whiplash end.

Uncle Abner himself inspires little affection. Always heavy, often sanctimonious, he tends to confuse himself with some Old Testament prophet dispensing God's justice. And yet he radiates strength, including the strength of common sense; by sheer bludgeoning attack he joins the immortals.

Supporting thrillers? Beginning with the escape of a black fugitive from New Prison, *The Wilby Conspiracy*, by Peter Driscoll (Lippincott, $6.95), blasts upcountry through South Africa under hard-fisted Afrikaans rule.

Almost at once we focus on big Jim Keogh, Liverpool Irishman whose engineering degree matches a heart in the right place; on Rina, Keogh's svelte mistress, and on Shack Twala, the escaped prisoner, with all three on the run after Keogh has conked some Boer cop with a wine-bottle. Carrying a fortune in diamonds, cynically but unalterably honest, Keogh must restore those diamonds to their rightful owner.

North they race, Cape Town to Johannesburg, then north again for sanctuary, pursued by Rina's ex-husband and by two Dutch

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security officers like avenging bogles on the trail. It's all a complexity of problems—who *can* be trusted?—until one last burst of gunplay in the hills. *Vivat Hibernia!* Jim Keogh, who has had our sympathy, emerges in triumph. Verdict: first class.

In another part of Africa, until these early 1960's called the Belgian Congo, mystery-adventure sparks *The Lingala Code*, by Warren Kiefer (Random House, $5.95). Ph.D. Michel Vernon, C.I.A. agent at the American Embassy, faces the inexplicable murder of his pal Ted Stearns, who had no enemies but was shot by some unknown hand.

Who killed Colonel Stearns, and why? We meet the beautiful Swedish girl for whom he has neglected his wife; we meet Congolese police; we meet native leaders; we uncover whole nightmares full of motives until Vernon's solution rounds out a superior thriller with overtones of cloak and dagger, too.

Still another superior thriller, also with overtones of espionage, will be found in George Beare's *The Bee Sting Deal* (Houghton Mifflin, $5.95). Used though we are to crooked escapades in high finance, this one rears its trouble-spot bridge in the East, island to Persian shore, on a scale truly gigantic. Operation Bee Sting, with wholesale massacre, can be thwarted only by wholesale adventurer Victor Stallard and Cynthia Godwin, his well-meaning if ill-mannered Girl Friday. Though pitiless Colonel Davies seems several jumps ahead, he can't stay there. At the torpedo tube of a submarine Stallard chases the bad guys' yacht and will blow her up unless she obeys. Once all echoes have faded away, everybody still alive can be happy.

And so we come round in a circle to end, as we began, with Melville Davisson Post. Since I must send you to second-hand bookshops for *Uncle Abner*, no paperback being available, let me add one other suggestion.

In addition to Abner of the mountains, this author at his best created at least four other detectives: *Monsieur Jonquelle, Prefect of Police of Paris*; Sir Henry Marquis, from *The Sleuth of St. James's Square*; Colonel Braxton, from *The Silent Witness*; Captain Walker, from *Walker of the Secret Service. Monsieur Jonquelle* contains one all but perfect story, "The Great Cipher."

Should you encounter any of these books in the course of your browsing, seize and hold. Or perhaps some enterprising publisher will reissue all five. We are not given many writers with the many skills of M. D. Post. Let's honor them when and while we can.

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A NEW "historical" by

THEODORE MATHIESON

A "hitherto unknown" event in the life of F. Scott Fitzgerald, his wife Zelda, and their good friends the Murphys. It "happened" in 1924 in the South of France—at Antibes—while the Fitzgeralds were house guests of the Murphys . . .

A young French-Irish-American journalist recalls that when he was twelve years old a peculiarly baffling murder occurred on the private beach of the Murphys' Villa America. The journalist tells his editor that F. Scott Fitzgerald was either the murderer or knew the murderer's identity . . .

Perhaps this is the first of a new series about famous literary figures involved in "hitherto unrecorded" mysteries . . .

THE F. SCOTT FITZGERALD MURDER CASE

by THEODORE MATHIESON

In the year 1935—I was 22—Hitler ordered conscription in Germany, Will Rogers and Wiley Post died in a plane crash at Point Barrow, and the Social Security Act was passed by the Congress. In that year, too, I found out that F. Scott Fitzgerald was not dead, as many people believed; he was still living in Asheville, North Carolina.

I had come north from New Orleans, when I bought a day-old copy of the *New York Post* at a station stop, and discovered a feature article about Scott on the front page.

"The poet-prophet of the postwar neurotics observed his fortieth birthday yesterday in his bedroom in the Grove Park Inn here (in Asheville). He spent the day as he spends all his days, trying to come back from the other side of Paradise,

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from the hell of despondency in which he has writhed for the last couple of years . . ."

The article, written in a sardonic vein, would sear poor Scott to the heart, and as I read on I felt the fighting Irish blood in me triumph over the practical French. So when the train reached Asheville I hurried to the nearest phone and called my editor in New Orleans.

"Paul," I said, "you remember I told you I knew F. Scott Fitzgerald when I was a kid?"

"That drunken prankster!" Paul said. "Did I ever tell you I was in a restaurant one night when he started throwing ashtrays and ended up crawling under the carpet making noises? What about him?"

"I thought he was dead, but he's living here in Asheville. The *New York Post* has just crucified him as a has-been. I'd like to do a proper article on him."

"You see that Warner woman, as per appointment!" Paul snapped, "and come back on tonight's train."

"Paul, this is the man who wrote *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby!*"

"Yeah, and who remembers 'em?"

"All right, if his quality as a writer doesn't impress you, how about this? When I knew him at Antibes there was a murder. I've always thought he was involved."

"You mean he might have *done* it?"

"I think there's a strong possibility. It was a fantastic affair, and I suspect that if Scott is innocent he at least knows who did it."

"Well, why didn't you say that in the first place? Go see the Warner woman, and then get on Fitzgerald. Make it rare, as in s-t-e-a-k, understand?"

He hung up before I could tell him there had been a murder, all right, and Scott was my chief suspect, but for personal reasons I had no intention of ever writing up *that* story. So I decided to skip a visit to Scott.

Then I was in a taxi headed for the Warner estate on the outskirts of Asheville, where I had a luncheon date with Madeleine Warner.

The interview went well. Mrs. Warner, from a famous family of Virginia beauties, had led a wandering and exciting life abroad until she and her silent-movie-actor husband settled in Asheville, where they became Very Important People, noted for entertaining well-known artists, actors, and musicians. Also, Mrs. Warner was involved in many charities, one of which was the successful

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rescue of alcoholics, a service she had rendered an ex-mayor of New Orleans—which was why I was there.

We were sitting on the terrace after lunch, when, apropos of the cure of alcoholism, I mentioned F. Scott Fitzgerald.

"Scott is a very dear friend of ours, you know," she said, "and comes to visit us often, although I must confess that my attempts to help his condition have not been notably successful."

I asked her if she had seen the article in the *New York Post*.

"Indeed I have," she said indignantly. "Life has not been kind to Scott. Now that he has lost Zelda to madness, now that magazines reject his stories, and his books have almost been forgotten by the general public, and his health is broken, some unfeeling reporter must write like *that* about him! Too bad you couldn't do a kinder article on him, Mr. Kelly."

"I was thinking about it, but I'm afraid I might disturb him with old memories. I was just a boy at the time he was in Antibes, staying with the Murphys, who are still famous, I believe, for entertaining half the celebrities in Europe and America."

"And were you a child celebrity?" Mrs. Warner asked with good-natured malice.

"Good heavens, no. My mother was the French cook there and Sara—Mrs. Murphy—permitted her to keep me with her. My father was an American flyer killed in action early in the war, and mother never remarried. Often I would wander out of bounds into the garden and Scott would talk to me. He always seemed to listen to what I said, as if my words were the most important ones in the world at the moment.

"We talked about my school and of the books I'd read. I was very fond in those days of mystery stories—Arthur B. Reeve was my favorite writer, and Professor Craig Kennedy my favorite detective. But Scott always encouraged me to read better stuff. 'Always hit for the best,' he'd say. 'Never be satisfied with the second rate, even in mystery fiction.' "

"*He* never was," Mrs. Warner said. "Even Zelda never realized what a perfectionist he was as an artist, and I've often thought—" She shrugged. "You *must* go to see him, Mr. Kelly."

"Of course I could just talk of the happy things. The famous people, whom I didn't know were famous until years afterwards—Rudolph Valentino, the movie star, and his wife; John Dos Passos, E. Phillips

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Oppenheim, Mistinguet, Max Eastman, Alexander Woollcott —many others. They were all so gay and inspired. I used to stand outside the garden fence and watch them, always up to something.

"One time the daughter of one of the visitors—she was only four years old—said she wished she were married. Scott said, 'Why not marry me?' So he decorated Murphy's Renault with satin and covered it with flowers. The little girl looked beautiful, all dressed up in a white gown and bridal veil. Then she and Scott got in the car and he drove her around for a while and then they came back."

"Such remembering would be wonderful for Scott!" Mrs. Warner said. "Do go and see him. He's staying at the Grove Park Inn. If you like I'll telephone him and see if it's convenient for him to see you this afternoon."

I said I would be delighted, but I had misgivings. I might talk about the bright things to Scott, but I knew the shadow of that murder would be sure to fall between us . . .

That summer of 1924 the Fitzgeralds had stayed for a month with the Murphys at Villa America. It was a beautiful place, set in a garden of oranges, lemons, mimosas, and cedars of Lebanon; from the terrace overlooking the garden you could see the Mediterranean, blue as a peacock's eye, and the Golfe Juan and the Esterelles beyond.

Scott and Zelda had spent the preceding winter and spring in Italy, and had watched the filming of *Ben Hur* with Ramon Novarro and Carmel Myers. Being a movie buff myself, I sneaked out of kitchen quarters to hear his descriptions of the actors and 'the bigger and grander papier-mâché arenas than the real ones.' Also, Scott had conceived a great dislike for the Italians, because after he'd hit a policeman in an argument about a taxi fare he had been beaten and thrown into jail.

All the same, I made a hero out of him and managed to be in the garden when he sunbathed there or practised his dart throwing, at which he excelled, hitting the gold almost, it seemed, without trying. Once Mr. Murphy, who was always pottering about in a beaky cap and swinging a walking stick, ordered me back to the kitchen. But Scott must have spoken to him, for after that I was permitted to be in the garden whenever my hero was there.

Then one night I heard an imperative rapping on the stout

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wooden door of the villa, and the murmur of excited voices, and I knew another visitor had arrived. I caught sight of him next morning as my mother served breakfast—a tall bearded man with fierce eyes who wore golden earrings and talked in a loud voice. He wore a loose-fitting black tunic and shiny black boots, and carried a riding crop which he kept slapping in the palm of his hand.

At her first glimpse of him my mother came cringing back to the kitchen.

"I have seen that man somewhere," she whispered. "He is like a bird of ill-omen. Rezanov, they call him, but I don't think that is his name. You stay away from him, do you hear?"

I could see she was frightened, but it was not until she sent me upstairs to fetch some linen from a closet that I learned my mother was not the only one whom the man Rezanov had disturbed. As I passed the room occupied by Scott and Zelda, I could hear Scott talking loudly to his wife.

"I will not have you alone in the same room with that Dmitri. He's a thoroughly bad egg and half mad besides!"

"He's a man of history," Zelda replied with spirit. "He had great influence with the Czar. How can he help acting so imperatively? Would you have him behave like a trained poodle?"

"It would be more in keeping with his pocketbook!"

"Oh, he has money enough. He told me—"

"So you've talked to him. When? In Paris last spring? And *alone?*"

Having secured the desired linen, I hastened downstairs with it, disturbed to hear Scott and his wife arguing so heatedly.

Later in the day I wandered into the garden hoping to find Scott there, and found Rezanov instead. He was sitting on a bench.

"Come here, *mujic,*" he ordered, scowling at me and pointing with his crop to a strip of grass where I knelt, as if in obeisance. "Who are you? What is your name?"

When I'd told him he leaned forward, and, looking at me with quite mad eyes, lowered his voice.

"There's no place safe in the world any more, *malchek.* Not even here, where I thought to find friends, and find only enemies. But you will be the friend of Boris, will you not?"

I said I would, too frightened to say otherwise.

"Now look, I want you to fetch for me five things. But you must not let anybody

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know you have got them. A piece of raffia—exactly six feet long, no more, no less. Then, two eggs—there must be two! A Vestal match—the kind they use in the kitchen. And finally, an Excalibur. That's a sword, you understand—it was the name of King Arthur's trusty weapon. But I cannot expect you to find it in ten minutes, so a kitchen knife will do. But it must be sharp—*very* sharp! Bring all these things to my room tonight, after supper."

He put his hand on my shoulder and pressed until it hurt.

"Remember, you and I are friends. But I have enemies in this house, and the things I have ordered will save me from them!"

At first I had the impulse to report the incident to my mother. But then I had the feeling that perhaps he was making sport of me, which was not unusual for some of the Murphys' guests to do. Once a famous hypnotist had me flopping about on the terrace like a chicken, and when I came to I went screaming to my mother. So I decided I would play his game, although I distrusted the gleam in his eyes.

By that evening I had gathered together the five items—although I had a little trouble finding the raffia until my mother located, in a basement bin, a whole cache of the stuff which Mrs. Murphy had used when she took up basketry as a hobby several years before.

So shortly after supper I delivered the items at the door of the Russian's room. He took them from me gravely, put several coins into my hand, held his finger to his bearded mouth, and closed the door.

Downstairs, Mrs. Murphy, looking trim in a bathing suit and wearing a rope of pearls around her neck—she enjoyed swimming off their private beach in the evenings—met me in the hall, her face stern, and beckoned me into the living room. Here, Mr. Murphy, looking frighteningly bizarre with his long sideburns and holding a gold-headed cane, sat in one of the chairs made of aluminum tubing, a far-away look in his Irish blue eyes.

Mrs. Murphy sat down at the grand piano with the big ball bearing on it and motioned me to a footstool.

"Now, Michael Kelly," she said, "I want you to tell us the truth. You've been up to see Mr. Rezanov, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"He wanted you to bring him some—some odds and ends, is that it? What did you take him?"

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"Some raffia, two eggs, a Vestal match, and a knife, which he called an ex—something."

She looked sharply at her husband.

"Did he tell you what he wanted them for?"

"He said they would protect him against—people. I didn't understand."

"Of course you didn't. Mr. Rezanov is not—well, responsible for his actions. In fact, if you have anything further to do with him you might find yourself in danger. Do you understand?"

"No, madame."

"Then let me make it clear. So long as he remains here you are to keep away from him. Do you understand *that*?"

"Yes, madame."

"Then you may go. And you may tell your mother what I've said to you."

As I went down the hall, I heard Mrs. Murphy say to her husband, "I will not permit that man to stay more than another night under this roof. Vladimir Rezanov is a madman, and he is up to something, you may be sure, that will end up with some extravagant unpleasantness of the kind that happened to us in Deauville."

"He is my friend, Sara, and no stranger than some of yours," Mr. Murphy said. "He will stay as long as I wish him to."

"Then you will be responsible if something happens to him. You know how Scott feels toward him, and if looks could kill—"

I ran for the kitchen then and told my mother what Mrs. Murphy had said.

"Do not worry, *bebe*," mother said. "Mrs. Murphy will see that Monsieur Rezanov goes. She always gets her way."

"But if Mr. Fitzgerald should do anything—I mean—to *hurt* Mr. Rezanov!"

"Your friend is a good man. He would not hurt anyone."

I went to bed that night dwelling on my mother's words. I liked Scott more than any other visitor the Murphys had ever had. He had read some of my pathetic attempts at short stories, written in labored English, and he had encouraged me to keep writing, giving me pointers in the manner of one craftsman to another. No one else had ever treated me like that. More than once he said something I didn't understand then, but have since had reason to reflect on: "It is from the failures of life, and not its successes, that we learn most."

The next morning—mother and I were usually the first to rise at the villa—I was eating my breakfast in the kitchen when

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mother returned with the milk bottles from the road. In order to do that she had to pass through the garden above the terraces which led down to the beach, and when she appeared she was moaning and making the sign of the cross.

"What is wrong?" I cried, leaping up. "What did you see out there?"

"*Non, non, bebe*—stay here. It is not for your eyes!"

But I was out the door before she could stop me, running along the upper terrace until I reached a place where I had a clear view of the beach.

I ought to explain here, perhaps, about the beach. When the Murphys first came to Antibes there were no sandy places for swimming. Beaches for miles along the coast were overlaid with packed red seaweed, for the natives did not like swimming, believing that exposure to the salt water was bad for the liver. But soon after the Murphys had built the villa, Mr. Murphy cleared a few hundred yards of seaweed at the foot of his garden as a private beach for himself and his guests.

Now the clean white sand lay exposed, smooth and packed, the feeble Mediterranean tide having but recently gone out. And in the middle of the strip, halfway between the water line and the tidal margin, I saw a familiar figure in a black silken tunic lying on the sand . . .

The Inspector of Police, Monsieur Plaisanter, was a Frenchman who affected tweeds and a pipe, and insisted on practising his unfluent English. But he was kind and patient in his questioning of the entire household, including me.

The facts of the murder had been as baffling to me as the character of Rezanov himself. There had been no footprints anywhere around Rezanov, nor had he been washed up from the sea; for, as I explained to the Inspector, when I went down to the beach to look I touched him and found his clothing dry.

Rezanov's hands and feet were tied, rather loosely, with raffia, the ends of which had been burned. Two unbroken eggs lay less than a foot away from him, and the kitchen knife was sticking out of his back.

"No man can stab himself in the back, *mes amis*," the Inspector said to us in the living room around mid-morning, after he reported that Rezanov's body had been taken away. "Therefore, it was not suicide, as you suggested, Madame Murphy—it was murder. But none of you has given

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me the good *raison* for it!"

His eyes passed over Scott's face, which looked haggard, and I suspected he had been drinking heavily again. Zelda was white and trembling. The Murphys appeared calm and detached.

When the Inspector had asked me earlier if I knew of any hostility directed against Rezanov, I had not mentioned the exchange between Scott and Zelda that I had overheard, although I did tell him that Mrs. Murphy had insisted that her husband send Rezanov away.

"I understand you did not wish to have Mr. Rezanov remain in your house, Madame Murphy," the Inspector said now. "Would you tell me why, please."

Sara glanced at her husband and then at me, and her eyes glittered.

"He was a madman, that's why. We knew him in Deauville some years ago, just after he came out of Russia. He was unpredictable even then, as well as ruthless and unscrupulous in his relations with women."

"You liked him, Monsieur Murphy?"

"I found him amusing."

"And how about you, Monsieur Fitzgerald?"

"I found him a bad egg."

"Had you known him before you came here?"

Scott glanced at Zelda.

"We met him in Paris two years ago. He was broke then, and sponging on those Russian exiles who still had a little money."

"And did you consider him mad?"

"Utterly."

The Inspector shook his head and lapsed into French.

"Indeed, all this would be easier to understand if Monsieur Rezanov had killed *himself*. Then one might expect him, as a result of the madness which all of you attribute to him, to bind his own hands and feet with raffia and burn the ends, and to lay two eggs upon the sand. But why should the *murderer* do these things, unless he, too, is mad?"

"Maybe he was trying to tell us something," Scott suggested.

"The murderer? Why should he do that? And another point. How did the murderer get close enough to stab the Russian without leaving his footprints in the sand?"

"Maybe he *threw* the knife," I said, and instantly regretted my words.

"Have you any reason for thinking so?"

I blushed and stammered, but I had to go on, or make myself look foolish.

"Well, the eggs," I said, pointing to where the Inspector

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had placed them in an ashtray on a taboret. "Are they still uncooked? Or have they been hard-boiled?"

"They are still raw," the Inspector said.

"What difference would that make?" Scott asked curiously.

"They were lying on the sand not more than twelve inches from Monsieur Rezanov's hand—at least five feet from the tide line. The murderer couldn't have leaned over and laid them down without leaving a mark. And if he'd thrown them, wouldn't they have broken? So it must have been Monsieur Rezanov himself who put them there."

"This we must establish," the Inspector said, and picking up the eggs he led the way out of the villa, and we all followed him down to the beach. At the last minute he handed the eggs to me and nodded gravely.

I threw the first egg at a distance of five feet or so, as gently as I could, on the hard-packed sand. It broke and splattered. So did the second. Then Scott ran off to the kitchen and came back with a cartonful. Everybody started pitching eggs. Not one landed without cracking open.

"And what do we learn from this?" the Inspector asked finally.

I said proudly, "If Rezanov put the eggs down himself, which it seems he must have done, because there were no signs of footprints or struggle around him, then he was *alone* at the moment of his death. Therefore, the knife which killed him *must* have been thrown."

"And who is an expert knife thrower here?" the Inspector asked.

But everybody answered his question with blank stares . . .

Over a decade later, riding up in the elevator to Scott's room at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville—Mrs. Warner had made an appointment by telephone for me to visit him at three that afternoon—I relived that moment on the beach when I was twelve years old.

Whatever Rezanov's plan was with the raffia, the two eggs, the match, and the knife on that long-ago morning, it had not included somehow killing himself. Of this I had always been certain.

I had often visualized the Russian as he went down to the beach, jumping the five feet of hard-packed sand, then after taking the two eggs from separate pockets and laying them down, tying his own feet and hands with raffia. I had surmised he'd had an accomplice who, instead of following

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Rezanov's mad orders, had decided to kill him and thrown the knife with deadly accuracy.

I knew that Mrs. Murphy disliked Rezanov and had tried to persuade her husband to ask him to leave. But I also knew that Scott had his reasons for hating the Russian. And if he were so expert at throwing darts, could not that skill be extended to throwing a knife?

It wasn't proof, I knew. A third person, unknown to me, could have gone down with Rezanov to the beach that morning. But there was enough validity in my suspicions to have kept them alive all these years, and as I knocked on Scott's door I half resolved that regardless of consequences I must ask him outright about the matter.

The door was opened by a brisk and efficient-looking young woman who turned out to be Scott's nurse. She led me through a small vestibule and into a large and airy room where Scott sat propped up in bed, smoking a cigarette.

"Welcome to Sunnyvale Sanatorium," he said, shaking my hand warmly as the nurse went out. The look in his penetrating eyes was still focused and intent, but the Byronesque sharpness of his features had been blurred by time, and his face looked battered and beaten; and his hands trembled. He walked strangely, too, with one shoulder thrust stiffly forward; but this, I learned, was the result of a diving accident a few weeks before, in which he had broken his shoulder.

He poured us both a Scotch—very much less for himself, I noted; then we settled down and he encouraged me to fill in the gap since our last meeting in Antibes.

"I always envied your fluency in French, which I could never master," he said when I told him I now wrote for a French-language newspaper. "And how is that queen of French cuisine, your mother?"

"She died, you know, just after you left the Murphys. Very suddenly, of a heart attack. Didn't they tell you?"

"The Murphys regard death as a taboo subject." He gave me a sharp look. "How soon after we left?"

"It must have been the same day, or the day after."

"That soon!"

Scott made a trip to the highboy, in the drawer of which was the bottle, and refreshed our drinks. A silence fell between us, and I thought: Now is the time to ask him.

But as I started to speak he said, "Did you ever figure out that mad-Russian mystery?"

"I've had some ideas."

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"Tell me."

"You won't take offense?"

"I'm learning to take much less offense these days. Nothing other than strict honesty, agreed?"

I explained then my theory about the accomplice and what I thought happened that morning on the beach. I hastened to assure him that it was merely a suspicion, but it had plagued me through the years, and that he could tell me the truth, if he wished, and that if he had a secret it would be safe with me.

All the while I spoke he watched me with growing amusement and when I finished he began to laugh and laugh until I thought I detected a note of hysteria. The nurse must have thought so, too, because she appeared briefly; but he waved her away and went on laughing.

Finally he got up, and going to a drawer in the highboy, took out a photograph album which he riffled through until he found a glossy print. This he flipped down on the table in front of me. It was a picture of the Russian Rezanov, dressed in his black tunic, glaring arrogantly at the camera.

"Look on the back."

In flamboyant script on the opposite side was written: *From Rudolph Valentino, alias Count Boris Rezanov.*

"You mean—it was Valentino playing that part!"

"Of course. Rudy, the Murphys, and Zelda and I trumped up a joke on you, partly to tease you for the kind of detective authors you were reading. Your favorite, you told us, was Arthur B. Reeve—remember? Well, we simply concocted a plot and acted it out—but we gave you clues. The first lay in the five items Rudy—Rezanov—asked for. The initials of the articles spelled out the name *Reeve*—R from raffia, double-e from two eggs, v from Vestal, and e from Excalibur.

"The second clue lay in the fact that each of us, in our conversation, referred to Rezanov by a different first name: I called him, I think, Dmitri. He called himself Boris, and Sara referred to him as Vladimir. Then, too, the Inspector—a friend of Rudy's, by the way, and an actor on vacation—called himself Plaisanter, which as you know means joke in French. Surely those clues should have made you at least suspicious."

"They didn't," I said wryly. "What about the knife in his back, the blood—"

"All stagecraft. Your mother was in on the joke, too, sending you upstairs just in time to hear Zelda and me quarreling and speaking some pretty trite lines.

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In fact, when we left, we told your mother to give you several days to work on the problem and see if you came up with the answer. But you tell me she died before she could let you in on it. And I suppose the Murphys never thought of explaining—or perhaps because your mother had just died . . . I'm sorry if you've spent the last decade thinking I was a murderer—but I guess I rather asked for it!"

When I left him, Scott was in a much better mood than the one in which I'd found him. He said he hadn't had such a good laugh in ages, and I guess that's about as much as a visit can do for a man.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 374th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an unusual "first story"—unusual in its quality and in its subtle, sophisticated theme . . .

The author, Jerrold Phaon (a pseudonym), was 23 when he submitted "Hunting Season." An English teacher in Allentown, Pa., he is a graduate of Penn State University and working on his Master's Degree. He is married, and his wife and he have two children, a girl and a boy. They live in a rural village "on the first ridge of the Pocono Mountains."

The "Phaons" are avid campers and hikers, and enjoy most winter sports. Mr. Phaon drives 50 miles a day to and from work in all weather. "It isn't a very exciting or glamorous life, but then, as I said, I like to live quietly"—and in spare time he writes stories . . . Watch this "quiet man"—he has things to say . . .

HUNTING SEASON

by JERROLD PHAON

"I don't know why you even bother," Mildred McKay told her husband. "Every year it's the same thing—you drag out that damn gun and clean it at my table and get that foul-smelling mess all over."

"It's not a gun," Harry answered. "It's a rifle. A thirty-oh-six." He wiped the barrel with the polishing cloth he had been using, then lifted the rifle to his shoulder and sighted across the kitchen at his wife. "Bang! You're dead," he said.

Mildred turned around at the sink. "Don't point that gun at me," she said.

"Bang Bang Bang," he said. He laughed and lowered the rifle and cradled it in his lap. "I keep telling you, my dear. It's a rifle. A *rifle.*" He lifted his eyes from the rifle and looked at his wife. Mildred had gone back to her dishes.

"Don't make any difference

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to me," she said. "Guns, rifles, peashooters. They're *dangerous*. I don't like them in my house."

"When I was in the Marines," McKay began, "we didn't dare call our weapon a gun. For three years of the war my rifle was the best friend I had. The *only* friend I had," he added.

"You'd think that after carrying one of them things around for three years you'd of had enough to last a man a lifetime. I can't see it myself. What it is men get out of hunting."

"A man learns a lot of strange things about himself during wartime," McKay said. "He learns that man is a predatory animal. A man will kill to stay alive, but more importantly, he will kill for the pure and simple fun of it. It satisfies this primitive urge that's in every one of us. It's an instinct that is set loose in a most uninhibited manner during wartime, then has to be locked up again and kept inside our so-called civilized philosophy: namely, 'Thou shalt not kill.' It's one reason why there are so many murders following a war. And also, by the way, why so many men take up hunting. It's a way for them to vent their frustrations. A man is never freer in his soul as when he is taking a life."

"Sounds like a lot of hocus-pocus to me," Mildred McKay said. "I certainly hope you don't spout off like that to the college kids you teach."

"I realize it would be taxing your limited intellectual abilities to understand," McKay sighed. "Especially in a person used to a lifetime of stifling all natural urges. Ah, well, killing is something few women understand anyway."

"Sounds to me like a windy excuse to go out and slaughter innocent animals. Or take a day off from responsibilities at home," Mildred added. She dumped the dishwater down the drain. There was a loud sucking noise as the water escaped through the plumbing. "This drain is going to clog up again," she said.

"It wouldn't if you'd stop using it as a garbage disposal."

"Hmmph," she said. She wiped her hands on her apron. "Well, I'm going to open a can of peanuts and watch some TV. What time do you want to be rousted out of bed in the morning, Harry?"

"I'll be getting up much too early for you, my dear. I'll stop for breakfast along the way."

"Well, don't you go getting yourself shot for a deer. Every year you hear about somebody getting shot out in the woods during hunting season."

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"I assure you, it's quite deserted where I go. Few hunters know of this place."

"It's so deserted even the deer don't go there," Mildred said. "Every year it's the same thing. You spend good money on a license, drag out that damn gun—okay, rifle—and go off running around in the woods the first day of deer season. And then that's it. All you come home with is wet feet."

McKay smiled curiously and sighted the rifle at his wife again. "Bang," he said.

Mildred humphed, opened the can of peanuts, and headed for the living room.

"Millie," Harry called after her. "Please try not to get peanuts on the carpet again."

For 25 years McKay had been going hunting the first day of deer season. He only went that one day, and always to a spot where few other hunters went. Once a year was enough. It always satisfied him. And in 25 years he had never once brought home a deer.

As always, the night before his trip he dreamed about that day on Saipan. It was the first week of July, 1944. The island still wasn't officially declared taken, but the Japs were beaten. It was just a matter of blasting them, one by one, out of their caves and holes.

McKay was the point man for a patrol that had run into trouble and was returning late. There wasn't quite an hour of daylight left. McKay was working his way along a little ridge overgrown with brush. It was a good place for a rathole sniper, the kind who sits in little holes in the ground with a little grass roof overhead, waiting for patrols to come by.

They had run into one on the way out and two men had been killed before they finally located the sniper and blasted him out with grenades. McKay's eyes and ears were sharply tuned to catch any movement or sound. But he was still surprised when he saw the Jap. He didn't expect the Jap to be just sitting there, lounging on the grass and enjoying what was left of the sunlight. He was smoking a cigarette. He probably thought it was a safe time to come out of his hole. By now most American patrols would be behind their perimeters of defense.

Still, he didn't expect a Jap to do anything as human as to relax. McKay was always surprised when he found a Jap helmet with a picture of family or a girl friend inside. Just like Americans. But you didn't expect it.

McKay sighted in and squeezed the trigger Bang and

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the Jap lurched and fell backward. His rifle clattered into the hole. When McKay went up to him the Jap was still alive. He had been hit in the back of the neck and there was blood drooling out of his mouth. A fly had settled on his cheek. He looked up at McKay and blinked just before the final shot. In death the shriveled, sun-dried little Jap seemed no more important than a stray dog that McKay had once shot at the garbage dump back home.

It had been the first time McKay had ever killed anyone. The experience left him with a strange feeling that he was unable to explain to himself until much later, until after the war, when he found his power to kill taken away from him. Killing was so effortless, so simple. McKay discovered that he enjoyed killing . . .

When he awoke at four o'clock he was filled with this feeling. He dressed and went downstairs and started a pot of coffee on the stove while he loaded the car. The house was quiet and peaceful now. The only thing that broke his feeling of absolute serenity was an open can of peanuts, half full, on the arm of the living-room couch. He took the can with him into the kitchen, found the plastic lid on the stove top, and put the can in its proper place in the cabinet. Then he sat at the table and sipped a cup of coffee and enjoyed a cigarette until four thirty.

By six o'clock he had driven far enough into the mountains to stop for breakfast. He pulled over at an all-night hash stand that had advertised its hours and its cuisine on faded, weathered signs along five miles of highway. There were two tractor trailers and a pickup truck in the graveled parking lot when McKay drove in. In the back window of the pickup a thirty-thirty lever-action Winchester was visible on a rack.

Inside, the room was permeated with a smoky mustiness that comes from cigarettes and heavy grease. It was a large room, poorly lit, with a few tables and a long low counter. A short-order cook in stained white pants and a T-shirt worked the grill while a sleepy, heavy-hipped waitress leaned against the cash register and smoked a cigarette.

McKay took a stool at the end of the counter closest to the other hunter. The waitress put her cigarette in an ashtray on the counter and came over with her pad.

"Two fried eggs, over easy," McKay said. "Some home fries and a slice of ham. And I'll have my coffee now."

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"Get that, Charlie?" the girl said.

By way of answering, Charlie cracked two eggs over his grill, scooped out a handful of potatoes, and laid a slice of precooked, presliced ham in the mess to warm. The waitress poured the coffee and brought McKay a knife, fork, and spoon. He found himself examining the prongs of the fork for food particles. The coffee was overcooked and bitter.

While he was waiting for his food, McKay swung around and nodded at the other hunter. He was a big man, with a quiet, long-jawed face and dark curly hair. His empty plate was pushed to the side and he was staring into a cup of black coffee.

"Out to try your luck the first day?" McKay said cheerfully.

The man lifted his head, sized up McKay, and nodded.

"Me, too," McKay said. "Always go the first day. Never get a deer, of course, but I find that being off by yourself in the woods, where a man can think and not be bothered, is the real lure of hunting. At least, that's the way it is with me. Some men go for the sport of killing."

The man furrowed his brows and looked curiously at McKay.

"You know these woods pretty well?" McKay asked.

"I been up here before," the man answered.

"Maybe you could give a guy like me a few pointers on where to go," McKay said. "Now, I don't mean to horn in on *your* territory, understand. But I'd sure appreciate it if someone would give me a tip as to where I could set up a nice stand."

The man considered for a moment. Then he said, "I usually make a right turn off the main road about six miles up. Puts you on a township road that follows along the ridge. Go in maybe five-six miles, to where you see the scrub oak growing. Had a fire some years ago, so everything looks dwarfed. I usually park along in there somewhere and walk down the ridge. There's a dried-up marsh after you're in a ways. I got a six pointer out of there two seasons ago."

"Well, that's very kind of you," McKay said. "Some men never like to give away their favorite spots."

"It's a free country," the man said.

"It is at that," McKay answered. "You look like a man who helped keep it that way, I might add. What outfit were you in during the war?"

"Thirty-second at Buna," the man said.

"Then you certainly did

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your share," McKay said. "The thirty-second was quite an outfit. I was in the Pacific myself, in the Marines. Second Division, Sixth Regiment."

The man nodded and gulped the last of his coffee. "Well, I'd better get a move on," he said.

"Nice talking to you," McKay said. "Maybe I'll run into you out there."

McKay found the pickup parked along the road where the man in the restaurant had said it would be. He drove on a mile beyond it before he pulled over and got his rifle from the back seat.

It was breaking into a cold day, but without wind. The sky was an iron overcast. McKay went down a short embankment at the side of the road and followed a narrow ravine through waist-high scrub oak. He looked straight ahead, stepping carefully, with his rifle in both hands, just as he had done when he was point man for a patrol during the war.

The tension had been building in him from the moment he had stepped out of the car. He made his way into the deeper brush, moving carefully, slowly, bringing his feet down soundlessly on the hard frozen ground. Then the brush started to thin out and give way to full-size trees. He came to a tiny creek and stopped. Something inside him told him to change direction, and he moved on again, bearing to his right.

He came to a place that was thickly grown over with laurel. He had to bend to make his way through it. After a while he came to a small clearing. The laurel and dogwood bushes formed a tight canopy overhead. The little creek widened here and dipped over a tiny rock bed into a shallow pool of moving water. The ground around the pool was torn up.

McKay backed out of the clearing and circled around through the underbrush. Then he stopped. Through the brush he could see the man from the restaurant warming his hands over a small kerosene heater. He was sitting on a log that had fallen between two trees, with his back to McKay.

McKay crept up behind the other hunter. There was a wild quickening of his pulse, but every muscle of his body went loose. It was just like the old days, just like being on Saipan. The woods were deathly quiet.

When he was close enough to get a good shot he dropped to one knee and aimed at the middle of the man's back. He rammed a cartridge into the chamber. At the sound of the bolt snapping, the other hunter turned around

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"Bang," McKay said, and pulled the trigger.

The bullet tore into the man's shoulder and bowled him over. He was on his hands and knees, scrambling for his rifle, when the second bullet tore into his face just below the left eye and exploded out the back of his head. He threw his arms out and collapsed.

McKay came up and sat down on the log. He looked at the still body of the other hunter. "You should really try to understand," he said aloud to the dead man. "Having been at Buna."

Mildred was at the stove stirring hot chocolate when McKay came in through the kitchen. The table was a mess of toast crumbs, butter smears, and dirty dishes. McKay closed the milk container and returned it to the refrigerator.

"Empty-handed again," Mildred said.

"Yes, but with my spirit cleansed."

"It was on the news about some hunter with his head blown off. Every year people keep getting killed."

"Don't let that dishearten you, my dear. These accidents *do* happen. But it's such a lovely experience that any risk involved is entirely worth it. While I was out in the woods today I met a husband and wife who go hunting together. Delightful people," McKay said. "Next year I think I shall insist that you accompany me."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 375th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . an offbeat, far-out story that only a show-business background could have spawned . . .

The author, Dennis Marks, is a TV writer and Broadway lyricist. On television he has written for Jackie Gleason and Bob Hope, and has written hundreds of animated cartoons; his play, "The Boston Spy Party," was an NBC special. For Broadway he was the creator and lyricist of the Sherlock Holmes musical, "Baker Street." His new play, "Boutique," a comedy co-authored with Willie Gilbert, is scheduled for production in the fall of 1972.

Mr. Marks is in his mid-30's, and he confesses that he has "wanted to have a story in EQMM" for 20 years, ever since he was 15. (Why did he wait so long? When he finally submitted a story he achieved this particular ambition on the very first try!) . . .

THE "VARIETY" MURDER CASE

by DENNIS MARKS

I was busy helping my friend Al the Songwriter walk his schnauzer, Bernie (named for many of Al's former agents). Al liked my work, so he told me this story, which he swears is true, and which I believe because I want to.

"You know the *Variety* Anniversary Number?" Al asked. He was referring to the hundreds-of-pages, end-of-the-year issue of the weekly show-business newspaper. I nodded and he was off and running.

"Well, in one of those issues not long ago, among the columns of nostalgia and ads and ballyhoo and statements of principles by people in the business who have gotten rich enough to reacquire a few, there was a one-eighth-page ad

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consisting of 38 names. Just names. No titles, no plugs or salutations. Just 38 names of people—as a group the kind of people you might meet during a ten- or fifteen-year career in show business.

"There were theatrical lawyers, agents, a couple of actors and actresses, some network executives, a few advertising guys, some TV, film, and Broadway producers, one TV director, a highly respected head of a legit repertory company, a couple of songwriters, and four music publishers.

"Nobody knew what connection existed between them or why there *was* this list—not even the people whose names were on it knew. They phoned among themselves at random and joked about getting free publicity, and then they forgot about it.

"Until the second list was printed in *Variety* two weeks later.

"It was the same ad, except that five of the names had lines through them. And the wild thing was that since the printing of the first ad, all five who were crossed out had been in accidents, and two of the accidents had been fatal.

"Well, you can imagine how the rest of the people on the list felt when *that* word buzzed around! They screamed for the police and the police immediately started looking for one person who was linked to all 38. An impossible job. Also impossible was supplying protection to the remaining 33 who, needless to say, lived on both coasts and were constantly traveling.

"The strange accidents continued to the people left on the list. The TV director was killed when his Porsche went out of control early one morning on the Sunrise Highway. The repertory entrepreneur ate from a tainted can of kippers and kicked off. From Beverly Hills to the Brill Building they kept slipping, sliding, falling, crashing, and exploding at an accident rate astronomically beyond coincidence. Yet no link could be found.

"They thought they finally got a break in the case when they apprehended the Chinese girl singer. She had pushed a TV exec, whose name was on the list, off the Scarsdale platform of the Penn Central just in time for him to catch the incoming 8:36 head-on. Unfortunately for theories, though, while she was answering questions in the Scarsdale police station, a packager of game shows who was on the list got shoved in front of a speeding Number 7 bus on Sixth Avenue by a

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63-year-old ex-tenor with a radio quartet.

"And two of the music publishers on the list barely survived a shooting accident in the woods outside of Grossinger's. And somebody else sent one of those cute cans of kippers to the Broadway producer, who incurred severe cramps and acute strangulation of the gut for days until his own natural biliousness putrefied the attacking poison and saved him.

"So the Chinese girl didn't connect with all the others, but there was an important clue in her story. The network exec was a mean, spiteful old man. He'd used the girl on one of his shows and when he found out her family had a Chinese restaurant, he got the girl's mother and brothers to close it down on New Year's Eve to cater an impromptu party in his hotel suite for free. And all night long he made fun of the mother, calling her 'Mama-san,' and squeezing her rear, and winking at his guests to show just how much he could make the old lady take because she thought she was helping her daughter's career.

"No question—definitely a guy who *should* have been killed. But this kind usually escaped with a gold watch and a condominium in Miami Beach. — Figure it out yet?"

"No," I said, and Al went on.

"The third version of the list was printed in the Drama Section of a Sunday edition of *The New York Times.* The cops had asked *Variety* not to accept another ad, but they forgot to ask *The Times.* The total of crossed-out names was now 18—six dead, twelve injured. It was turning into a rout.

"Here's where I came in. I was friendly with the detective in charge of the case, but I'd been out of the country recording theme music in Yugoslavia, dig? And while I was away, I toured a while, so all this happens while I'm gone. Now I'm back and my friend the detective shows me the list out of curiosity.

"One look and I know the connection. And I tell him, 'They're all S.O.B.'s. Every one of them. It's a list of classic bastards in show biz.'

"They're not your top-echelon head-of-the-studio dictators—they're the second-stringers, the types I run up against every day. I mean, let's face it, all I've had is a couple of hits, a few records, some special material, some scoring work. I'm not up there yet. But that's what most of show business is, where most of it's at! People like me. And to us that list was good enough

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to be engraved on a plaque and set in Duffy Square for the pigeons—sort of a Hate Shrine to the rotten creeps our lives depend on.

"Once I understood this, reading the morning paper became an adventure. Who got it today? And how was it done? It got to be a game everybody I knew was playing. I was called from the coast and told an hour after it happened about Bernie Number Three falling off his terrace. Then I began to feel a little embarrassed, as if I wasn't pulling my weight. I was reaping the rewards, but not doing anything to help out."

"I can understand that," I said.

Al's eyes brightened. "Can you? Really? Good! — I went down the list of those remaining and found two or three real good ones I thought I could handle personally. Out of them I picked as Number One a packager of children's TV shows who stole ideas and once cheated me out of a thou—a thou I really needed. Believe it or not I actually followed him one day.

"Between 48th Street and Grand Central I spotted at least three solid opportunities to let him have it. I was considering jabbing my umbrella into his back as he approached the top of the terminal's marble staircase when suddenly I bumped into an old friend, a really sweet actress I knew from years back, and we went for coffee instead. She's out of the business now. She'd had nothing but bad luck ever since she'd been dropped from a soap opera because the producer's wife didn't like the way she wore her hair. It was later on I remembered that the producer of her soap had been the same guy I had been following.

"I don't know where she was the night his house in Mamaroneck burned down, but I was with friends and I can prove it.

"Anyway, that's when I understood what had happened and what it was all about. There was no organization. There was no one person behind the crimes. One person, maybe two or three, *did* draw up the original list and take out the ads and perpetrate the first few attacks. But that's all they did. That's all they *had* to do. This set off a chain reaction—almost like a wave of retribution. In N.Y. and L.A. people read that list and understood it, and when they heard the S.O.B.'s were finally getting it, one by one, they said, 'Sure! Right on! Let's help. Let's do our bit!'"

"Just as *you* almost did," I said.

"Exactly," said Al. "I asked

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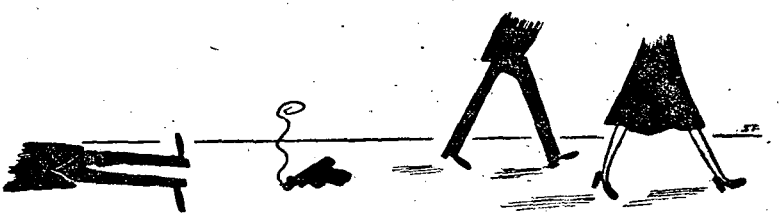
my friend the detective if he thought such a thing was possible, and he said yes, that had been one of his own theories, but his superiors wouldn't touch it with a fork. They're still looking for the original instigators, but he doesn't think they'll ever find them. They catch somebody occasionally in an individual case, like the Chinese girl and the ex-tenor, but the ones they catch never connect with anybody else. That's where it stands today, and there are only six names left."

I thanked Al for the story and told him I wanted to believe it was true, that I was going home to make up my own list of those "who never will be missed."

He laughed and said, "Better make sure *you're* not on somebody else's list."



SPADEWORK

by RICHARD M. GORDON

Archer his quietus got
When Bridget put him on the spot,
But from her charms Sam Spade demurred,
And so, at last, he got the bird.

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AUTUMN MADNESS

by JOHN LUTZ

Things were not going well between Blane and Willa Winslow, and the same could be said about the situation between the Dixie Stompers and the Gulf Coast Kings, two teams in the newly formed Southern Pro Football Conference. Neither team had been able to drive for a score, both had fumbled in the first quarter, and several fist fights had broken out between opposing players. The Kings' big lineman, Dale Stover, had been forced out of the game on the second play with a badly torn ligament. As Blane leaned forward in his vinyl easy chair, concentrating with all his being on the important third down play about to be run, a familiar and ominous form partially blocked his view. It was his wife Willa.

"There are things to be done around here," she said. "I think you've watched more than your share of football tonight." With seeming nonchalance she shifted her weight so that her ample hip completely blocked the TV screen just as the ball was snapped.

"*Weston gets the ball,*" the excited voice of Howdy Curtiss, the network announcer, cried. "*He's hit at the line, he struggles—oh, he's brought down by a vicious tackle by Otis Keefer, the middle linebacker of the Stompers!*"

"*That had to rearrange his old insides,*" Jeff (Granite) Gratowski, the color man, said with a chuckle.

"Get up," Willa said. "I know you heard me."

Blane glared at her. There was no way to make her understand the importance of the game, the profound things it stood for. And this was the network's Terrific Tuesday game, the last one until Monday night's battle between the Colts and the Chargers. That one would be a classic.

"I'll get to the basement and help you during halftime," Blane said firmly. He knew it was wisest not to refuse flatly. Willa had always been intractable, but since she'd become

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interested in women's liberation she had become almost impossible to deal with. Her once pretty but stern features had molded into mere sternness, the prettiness overpowered by an aggressive glare beneath no longer plucked brows. And last week, after the first meeting she'd attended of FIGHT—the Female Institution for Generally Harder Tactics—she had come home, awakened him from his dozing on the sofa, and told him things were going to change. FIGHT, she explained, was working on the draft of an ultimatum.

Willa stared hard at him, decided this wasn't the time for a showdown, and stalked to the basement door to continue her cleaning. The way she dressed now, she no longer had to change to do heavy work. Her daily uniform was Levi's and a faded sweat shirt, sans bra, of course. Small matter, thought Blane. He noticed a cobweb clinging to the seat of her Levi's as she stamped angrily down the stairs.

"*Oh, he's hit hard!*" Howdy Curtiss' voice cried. "*He's slow getting up after that one!*" Blane settled back in his chair, feeling the vinyl warming his back.

The red-jerseyed Stompers had to punt from their own ten. Hill, their kicker, sent up a high hanging punt, affording his team plenty of time to get downfield and avoid a long runback. The man the Kings had back deep to return the punt caught the football, broke one tackle, and was just beginning to hit his stride and pick up some blocking when he collided with two Stompers and was flipped completely into the air before being buried by red jerseys.

"*A bone-crushing tackle!*" Gratowski said. "*How he held onto that football I'll never know.*"

"*Sheer courage and determination,*" Howdy Curtiss observed in a reverent tone.

During an official time out Blane went to the kitchen to open his fourth bottle of beer. The score was still nothing-nothing and he was nervous. He'd bet even money on the Stompers. Not that he'd bet that much, really. It was more than the money, just a feeling he'd always had that the Stompers were *his* team.

As he loosened the cap on the beer bottle he could hear Willa in the basement, sliding some heavy cardboard boxes over the cement floor. Let her work like a man, Blane thought. He stood behind a counter selling tires all day while she found new ways to antagonize him. It was her job to work on

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weekends and in the evenings, if she really wanted things to be fifty-fifty. He walked softly back to his chair so she wouldn't hear his footsteps.

"*Aggressive as they come,*" Howdy Curtiss was saying. "*His coach at Western U. said he has the real killer instinct.*"

They had to be talking about linebacker Otis Keefer, one of Blane's favorite sports figures. There was no more vicious tackler than Otis Keefer. Blane remembered the close-up on him before the game during the playing of the national anthem —a solemn, gum-chewing individual, dark-haired, jut-jawed, not unlike Blane himself, though younger and larger, of course. Keefer had dwarfed the tiny cornerback next to him as they'd stood staring upward at the rippling flag. Pure dedication.

"*I think that one put Cardwell out of the game,*" Gratowski was saying. "*I don't like to second guess the doctors, but I wouldn't be surprised to hear Cardwell had some cracked ribs for his efforts.*"

Blane saw now what had happened. Keefer had come up fast and hit the Kings' running back Cardwell hard, forcing a fumble, and the Stompers had the ball now on the Kings' 48-yard line.

"*We certainly hope he isn't badly hurt,*" Howdy Curtiss said with concern. "*While we're waiting for Cardwell to be carried from the field there's a shot of the Commissioner and his lovely wife to his left. The man on his right is Chuck Hogan, one of the innovators of the moving-zone defense, a fine upstanding American.*"

"Blane!" Willa's voice suddenly barked from the basement. "Is it halftime yet?"

Blane pretended not to hear.

"Blane! You answer me!"

Some day he would divorce her. Oh, some day. "Just a time out," Blane called back. He stayed with Willa, he told himself, only for economic reasons. She and her divorce lawyers would milk him drier than a dead cow. There'd be no talk of women's independence then.

"Blane!"

Again he pretended not to hear.

"*All right,*" Howdy Curtiss said in an expectant voice, "*first and ten for the Stompers, the quarterback Gregson calling the signals. He gives the ball to Green—he breaks through! Runs to the Kings' thirty-five where he's knocked out of bounds!*"

Vic Green, the powerful halfback, was another of Blane's favorites.

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"You throw me the broom, Blane! It's hanging where you go down the steps!"

Without answering, Blane walked quickly to the basement door and absently tossed the broom down, hearing it hit the basement floor with a clatter.

"Damn you, you almost hit me in the eye!"

"*Power running,*" Gratowski was saying. "*What a punishing runner that Green is!*"

The Stompers tried two passes that were incomplete, then Green plowed into the Kings' line again and picked up five yards. Time out. Fourth and five with seven seconds left in the half. The field goal kicker came onto the field and attempted a field goal into the wind. Blane held his breath.

Partially blocked! Off to the left, the official's signal indicated. Still nothing-nothing.

Blane cursed as the half ended with a gunshot, and a drum and bugle corps strutted into camera range with waving flags and pounding drums to form the outline of a large asparagus on the field as they saluted the canning industry.

Blane felt so bad about the missed field goal he decided to let the halftime intermission slip by without telling Willa, so he could watch the highlights of last week's games. She could do a good enough job cleaning the basement by herself. If she complained he'd ask her how she'd like to sell tires all week.

The game was almost over when Willa marched heavily up from below. A feeling of dread shot through Blane, and he wished she'd waited another few minutes before coming upstairs. The Kings were now ahead on a field goal, three to nothing, but his Stompers had driven on short sideline passes down to within five yards of a touchdown with only 21 seconds left in the game.

"Halftime was an hour ago," Willa said with quiet fury. "I heard the band playing."

Blane didn't answer; he stared straight ahead at the TV. He wished with total commitment that Willa would just drop dead.

"I'm talking to you!"

The Stompers were ready for their second-down play. Green ran straight ahead, picked up two yards, then was hauled down by the neck. The Stompers called time out with 13 seconds left in the game.

"Wait until after the football game, Willa, please!"

"*Murderous hitting in the line,*" Howdy Curtiss exclaimed. "*You can hear the popping up here.*"

"I'm talking to you now, Blane!"

"*The tight end Smathers was*

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really creamed at the line of scrimmage," Gratowski said.

The Stompers lined up, tried a quick pass over the middle that was knocked down. But the play stopped the clock with nine seconds left. Third down—and three yards from a touchdown and victory.

"You chauvinistic crud!" Willa screamed. "I've had you and your football up to *here!*"

Green tried a running play, was smashed hard to the ground at the one-yard line. Another time out. Three seconds left.

"Do you hear me!"

Time for just one more play. The Stompers decided not to take the field goal and a tie. They'd go for the win!

"Shut up, Willa!"

"That front four just destroyed Green on that last play! Zynowski and Omar Bird brought him down, then Hoyle and Rogers smashed him for good measure."

"I won't shut up!"

The Stompers were lined up. They'd try a running play again with Green. Who else but Green?

"That Zynowski is one of the most hostile and vicious tacklers in the league. A fine football player and a credit to the game on and off the field."

"He almost snapped Green's neck on that last play. But here we go!"

Willa advanced on Blane so that he had to peer around her to see the TV screen. He leaned forward in his chair, his every muscle taut, straining, as the quarterback called the signals.

"Green gets the ball!"

"Blane!" Willa grabbed at his tense shoulder.

Blane saw Green's body lift into the air as it struck a solid line of defensive players and was hurled back and crushed to the ground.

"He doesn't make it!"

"Damn you, Blane!"

"He doesn't make it!"

Blane found himself on his feet, clutching at Willa's faded sweat shirt. "Shut up, Willa! Shut up!" He was shaking her violently. She kicked at his legs, sending a jolt of infuriating pain up one shinbone.

"Green didn't get over! He was thrown back and buried alive by that charging front four!"

"Blane, you're hurting my neck—"

"A bone-crushing tackle!"

The heavy ceramic ashtray in Blane's hand came down again and again on the back of Willa's head—

"A great play!"

Willa's body went limp and Blane stood over her, his lips drawn, his shirt front and hands covered with blood. Trembling, he dropped the ashtray and

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stood rigidly with both arms extended straight upward.

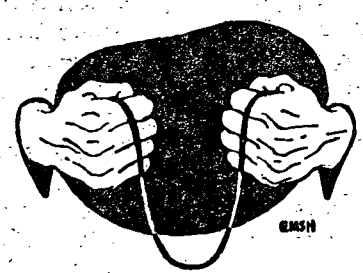
Touchdown!

"It'll be a tough battle, but we can win it," Blane's lawyer was saying. "We'll attack their strength, and then when they prepare their defense for our maneuver we'll plead guilty with extenuating circumstances—the old end around."

With his arms folded on the plain wooden tabletop Blane sat staring quietly downward. "Willa was a violent woman. Everybody knew she was a violent woman."

"That's an extra point in our favor."

Slowly Blane lowered his head onto his arms and began to weep, feeling his tears spread on the coarse blue denim of his prison shirt. The lawyer didn't know what he was talking about; he didn't really understand the game. Blane knew the officials were determined that he should have the major penalty. And it was useless to argue with officials.



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a NEW story by DANA LYON

Susie was alone in the world, an embittered old maid, with no friends, no relatives, no one even to talk to. She lived mostly on the pittance from her dead sister's insurance. She desperately needed a change, but of course she couldn't afford to go away. So when Anne and Greg, her former next-door neighbors, asked Susie to look after their house and two friendly dogs, while Anne and Greg took a trip—well, Susie's loneliness tipped the scales and led her to what was waiting beyond the door . . .

THE GOOD COMPANIONS

by DANA LYON

Greg and Anne Hayward were the only friends I had at the time they moved away from the city, and that left me with none. My sister Rose had been the one who made all the friends, working in an office the way she did with me staying home and keeping house for her; but when she died last year none of her fine friends bothered to come around and see me or invite me to their homes after they'd paid their condolence calls. So there I sat, alone, living on Rose's pittance from her insurance and the remains of our father's legacy, until Anne and Greg moved in next door; and why they paid so much attention to someone like me I'll never know—maybe just because they were kind and felt sorry for me.

Well, of course I was kind to them, too, like the time I took Greg some of my homemade soup when he had the flu and Anne was working—he was a writer, so he didn't have to go to work—and I guess some other times, too, though I can't place them. They were young folk, in their late twenties, and they didn't have too much of a social life; they seemed to be satisfied just to be with each other, except they'd drop in to see me quite often—to borrow an egg or use my phone if theirs was out of order or chat a bit . . .

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I missed them badly when they left but they said they couldn't stand the city noises any longer, they just had to get away, and they'd write.

"Dear Susie," Anne wrote shortly after they'd left, "we've found the most wonderful bit of land, a little clearing in some trees with a tank house (the regular house burned down some time ago) on it and real privacy. We're camping out now, but we're going to fix up the tank house until it's *darling* and then you must come to visit us. Best—

Anne and Greg."

Well, I didn't hear from them after that for ages, and then along came a letter from them Special Delivery:

"Susie dear—

"We're about to ask a great favor of you, though we think you might enjoy it, too. Greg has got to take a trip up north to see his family—his father is quite ill—and we don't want to leave the place alone, now that we've fixed it up. Especially our two darling dogs—of course we wouldn't leave them alone under any circumstances, but they hate the kennels where we take them occasionally when we go into the city, and they droop around for days afterwards.

"How would you like to have a little vacation here amidst the pines and sycamores or whatever, in the company of two wonderful dogs? They are no trouble at all, are wonderful protectors and good companions. Do say yes and let us know as soon as possible. Would have called, but we can't get a phone this far out. Will be waiting to hear. Love,

Anne and Greg."

Well, of course I said yes, even though they hadn't invited me to visit until I could be of some service to them. I hadn't been away from the apartment overnight since I could remember and I felt I needed a change but couldn't afford to go away, of course. Besides, I was curious to see what kind of place they had; no doubt they had exaggerated, young people being what they are, always talking about their wonderful experiences and opportunities that usually boil down to nothing much. So I took a bus and three hours later I was there.

Everything was as they had described it: the small two-storey tank house was now painted a pale blue with white trim, with pink geraniums planted all the way around it; the small clearing; the pine trees rising in the distance. And the dogs, who were introduced to me as Rex and Regina, one a huge German shepherd, the

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other a small, prancing, beautiful collie. They came up to me, while Anne and Greg looked on smiling, and I reached out a hand to touch the big dog on his head. He had been standing there looking amiable but now suddenly he changed, without seeming to move a muscle; there was something different and withdrawn about him, like a polite child you're going to kiss who doesn't want to be kissed.

I turned to little Regina, who had been dancing alongside him, also seeming amiable, but she too had changed although I hadn't made a move to touch her. It was as if she were blindly following the other dog's lead.

Now I can't say I don't like dogs, it's just that I've never had any experience with them, having lived in an apartment for the last thirty years, and I can't say my experience with other people's dogs has been too good. They always jumped up on me or growled or made messes in the wrong place or something, and I got so I couldn't help feeling that people who devoted their lives to their animals had something a little bit wrong with them, like not liking people but needing something to love.

Anne showed me around. "All you have to do," she said, "is feed the dogs morning and evening and they'll be happy. Oh, and keep their water dish full outside. Here's the dog door"—a big square hole in the back door with a flap over it—"where they can come in and out as they please." She laughed. "We let them sleep wherever they want, usually in the living room, but they're very neat, perfectly housebroken, they don't claw the furniture or get it dirty, so they have their way with us." She paused. "I hope you won't get too lonely here—the freezer is stocked with all kinds of food and everything is in good working order—"

She led the way up the narrow spiral stairs and showed me to one of the two bedrooms—the smaller one, naturally—which was clean as a whistle and fresh with sunshine. "You'll have to go through our bedroom to get to the bath—this place is so tiny, that's the only way we could manage a bath at all," she added apologetically. "I do hope you'll have a good rest while you're here. If you want to walk in the woods take the dogs with you; there's nothing to be protected from, really, but they're good company. Have fun."

Later the two of them waved goodbye and were gone in their little compact car, disappearing

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almost instantly through the tall dark trees.

There were plenty of things for me to do, as Anne had pointed out: walks in the woods, a color TV set although it could receive only two channels—but color! I'd always wanted one but couldn't afford it—and there were shelves full of books in the tiny living room, also a small fireplace to sit in front of during the chilly evenings.

I roamed outside and poked around a bit; I could see trees spreading off in all directions with only a narrow dirt road leading to the highway, and I couldn't help wondering why some people have all the luck. I would have loved a home like this—well, just for summers, perhaps—with a little car of my own and fresh air and country living. I couldn't help the touch of bitterness in me at the thought that people like Anne and Greg, so young and beautiful and free, with their lovely homemade house and beautiful surroundings, seemed to have everything. While I had nothing.

I looked through the books in the living room and selected a mystery that was years old. I sat down with it but couldn't put my mind on it. Restless, I got up and went to the kitchen, fixed myself a can of soup and some buttered toast, then went back to the living room where I turned on the TV—and a whole new world opened up before me. I'd never enjoyed Westerns in black and white, but now with the color, the landscapes, the mountains in the distance, all the blues and greens and yellows seemed to fill the room; I was lost in another dimension, far from the city and my dingy apartment and my colorless life as housekeeper for my busy sister, now gone. So dull since she died, so almost poverty-stricken. Again the thought came, why couldn't *I* have something like this all my own?

Then suddenly there was a dark shadow in front of the set, blotting out the picture, and I was frightened until I realized that it was Rex, the German shepherd, just standing there looking at me. Regina moved up beside him and they both stared at me. What on earth, I thought, then glanced at my watch. Eight thirty, the windows dark now, no light in the room except from the flickering screen.

"Get out of the way," I said to the dogs, but they sat there, unmoving. Oh, good heavens, I suddenly remembered, I forgot to feed them! Anne had said, "First thing in the morning you give each of them some canned

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dog food, and at five o'clock a dish of kibble." And now it was more than three hours past their suppertime.

I got some kibble out of the large paper sack under the sink, plunked down their dishes, then rushed back to the TV set.

Next morning when I came downstairs, there was a horrid smell. On the living-room rug was a mess that one of the dogs had left, and I can tell you I was furious. Anne had assured me they were housebroken. They sat and looked at me and I could feel the contempt in their whole beings—an extension of what caused the mess in the first place—which enraged and frightened me at the same time. I picked up the nearest thing I could find, the hearth broom, and chased them out of the house.

"You nasty creatures!" I yelled. "Get out of here if you can't behave yourselves!"

They scurried out through the dog door and I decided to punish them by not giving them their breakfast; they'd just have to wait until suppertime. That would teach them.

I cleaned up the mess and settled down to the TV again, though there wasn't much on except children's shows and women interviewing other women. All young, of course, nothing to interest a woman in her fifties. Well, I'd just have to wait until night to see a good show.

After the first day or two there wasn't much to do. I went for walks in the woods and the two dogs trailed behind me, but when they chased a skunk right across my path and I tried to get them to go after it, they just sat there and did nothing. Nothing but stare at me.

Weeks of waiting here, I was beginning to think, before Anne and Greg would be back. No human company. No traffic sounds. No one to talk to. Nothing to do but look at TV and read old books. Well, I decided after a few hours of idleness, maybe I'll make myself a pie with some of the berries in the freezer—Anne had told me that she and Greg had picked them themselves.

I spent the whole morning on two pies and put them on the table to cool, then went back to TV again—even the silly woman shows were better than nothing. Vaguely, through my absorption, I heard a slight noise in the kitchen but when I went out there later I didn't notice anything at first. Then—my pies! They had been carefully eaten down to the tin plates.

"Get out of here," I screamed at the two skulking dogs, beating them with the

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broom. "Get out and stay out!"

But I couldn't make them stay out because there was no way to lock the dog door. They came in again and sat looking at me. I tried to stare them down but they just sat there and looked at me; then Regina touched her nose to Rex's—communicating, I suppose—and went outside and I could hear her lapping water. She came in and sat down, staring at me again, and Rex went out and had some water.

"All right," I said at last, "if that's the way you want it, you can just go to bed tonight without your kibble. That ought to teach you."

After supper I sat down in front of the TV again and the dogs were quiet. Suddenly I remembered having seen a bottle of sherry in the kitchen, and I thought maybe a little would quiet my nerves, so I stood up to get it. The result was disastrous, for Regina had been sleeping at my feet, almost as if keeping watch on me; but I hadn't known she was there and as I stood up I stumbled over her and she yelped and I lost my balance and started to fall. As I did so I grabbed the floor lamp beside me but it wasn't enough to stop my fall, and it came down with me.

I sprawled out on the floor with the dogs carrying on, the lampshade broken, and me with a bruise on one leg. I was frightened and terribly nervous and, most of all, enraged. "Get *out* of here!" I yelled at the dogs. And hardly knowing what I was doing, I kicked out at Regina, hit her in the ribs, and she yelped again and the two dogs ran out of the room and through the dog door to the outside.

I got up, too shaken to know what I was doing, and limped my way to the kitchen where I had half a glass of sherry to quiet my nerves. Then I went upstairs to bed.

It was quiet during the night.

Next morning, when I came down, the two dogs were waiting for me at the foot of the stairs. Just sitting there silently, as if they had been waiting for me a long time. I was in no mood for amiability.

"Get out of the way," I said, but they didn't move and I started to go past them. Rex stirred slightly and the way was blocked, so I stepped past Regina, but Rex was there, too. "You crazy dogs! Don't you want me to feed you?"

Again I tried to move past them, but they didn't budge. "Get out of my way!" I said again, raising my voice. "Move! Out of the way!" They didn't stir.

I started to push past them,

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and now there was a long deep growl, the first I had heard from Rex, and when I looked at him his eyes seemed almost red. He pulled back his lips a bit and I could see the long fangs. I tried to push past Regina; she didn't growl, she simply snapped her sharp little teeth together, and it made a dreadful sound. Now they inched closer to me; now they were the aggressors, not I; now they were not blocking my way to the lower floor, they were pushing me upstairs.

"No," I said. "No. Good dogs, good dogs. I want to feed you, let me come down," and I moved down the stairs again; but there was that little collie snapping at my ankles and the big dog with the low growl in his throat. I moved back. This wasn't enough. Again the snapping and the growl until, step by step, I backed up into the hall above and was pushed against my bedroom door.

The dogs were on both sides of me now. Growl, snap; snap, growl—and finally I was in my room, the door closed quickly behind me, and those two terrible beasts on the other side. Now I breathed more easily, though I was still shaken and trembling.

Why hadn't Anne and Greg told me they were dangerous? How dare they leave me alone and unprotected with these dreadful creatures? What did they have against me that they must lure me here and leave me at the mercy of two dangerous beasts? I tried opening the door a wedge several times, but there were my antagonists, just sitting and looking at me.

After a while I grew hungry. And thirsty. I opened the door carefully, wider this time, but again came the low growl and I could see them both sitting there, watching, waiting. I closed the door again. Now that I knew I couldn't reach water, my thirst became acute. I must get to the bathroom off the other bedroom.

I put my ear to the door and heard nothing. But I felt the two uncanny creatures on the other side. There was silence, but they were there. Why? Why were they keeping me imprisoned like this? What did they want?

I thought, I must get out of here! Perhaps if I made a break for it? Opened the door suddenly and ran down the stairs? No, that wouldn't do, they could tear me apart. I'd just have to try my luck getting into Anne's and Greg's room where the bathroom was so that I could get some water for my parched throat.

I opened the door a crack, slowly, carefully. A growl, a

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snap. They were still there. But *they* would have to eat! They needed food even more than I did, for by now my appetite was gone though I still craved liquid. I would wait until they went for food; perhaps they'd finally realize that I was the one who fed them and would let me out for that purpose. They'd have to.

Or would they? They surely couldn't get at the canned dog food, but now I had a sudden picture of the large paper sack of kibble in the cupboard under the sink. And the cupboard door did not quite close. They could eat the kibble and they had water in the pan outside. How long would the kibble and water last?

My watch had stopped—I had forgotten to wind it. I did not know what time it was although I could see the shadows changing when I glanced out the window. My thirst grew, and now I was also beginning to feel the first pangs of hunger. I looked out the window again and there was Regina, capering about as if she had just eaten and now felt active and playful.

I opened my door. Rex sat there. Later I opened it again and Regina sat there. Alone. While Rex was eating, I suppose. "Nice doggie," I said, reaching out a hand to pat her on the head. The snap was sudden and dangerously close to my hand. She seemed to be smiling—although I know, of course, that dogs can't smile; but her eyes, those golden eyes into which one could gaze forever without reaching the bottom of the pit, were not smiling; they were deadly.

And so the two dogs imprisoned me, in shifts. Always one of them was outside my door. Rex could have torn me apart; Regina could not have done this but she could have ripped my legs to shreds. Singly or together, they were my keepers.

I could not last long without water. Often I went to the door and listened, afraid to open it, but I always knew one of them was there. I could hear the soft shhh-ing sound when they stirred, I could almost hear their breathing. I did not know how much time had passed; I knew that there was daylight and then dark, twice, and my throat was parched and my body weak.

Then, one day, the sky clouded over and grew dark and off in the distance I heard the rumble of thunder and saw an occasional flash of far-off lightning. I stood dully at the window, thankful for anything to break the monotony, too far

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gone in despair to realize what this storm could mean to me. But suddenly, when the huge drops spattered down, I came back to myself and reached my hands out frantically, cupping them for the cherished water. So little of it could I catch! I looked frantically about the room for any kind of receptacle and my eyes fell on a small, pretty glass bowl meant for flowers but now empty. I reached it out through the window and the rain lasted until the bowl was half full and then I sipped, rationing the water until I could plan some way out of my prison.

Occasionally, when there was complete quiet beyond the door, I would open it a crack; but instantly both dogs, or one of them when the other was busy eating or drinking or exercising, would leap up and stand there, no longer growling or baring fangs but looking like polite, well-trained pets. Smiling at me. It seemed. Once I tried opening the door enough to let myself through and I could feel, rather than see, the tenseness in their bodies, the preparation for attack, the guardedness that came over them when they sensed that I might escape.

Another time, when there had been quiet for several hours outside my door, an idea came to my mind. I went to the window and looked down at the ground: fifteen feet? Too far to jump with safety, but—I ran to the bed, ripped the sheets off, tore them into strips, knotted them together, then tied one end to the foot of the bed and threw the other out the window; it dangled to within a few feet of the ground. I pulled hard on my self-made rope and it held.

Then I went to the window and leaned over the sill and looked down, and there was Rex, sitting below, looking up at me, looking pleasant, looking amiable, smiling, smiling . . .

I do not know how long it has been now.

The weakness of hunger pervades me, now that the greater pain of thirst had been relieved, and I move about listlessly, or else sit on the bed and do nothing. There is no TV here, no radio, no reading material. Nothing but quiet and stillness and loneliness, and death by inches.

Once I came out of my lifeless lethargy at a sound outside my window. A horrible sound. Ravening. I went and looked out and Rex was below and he was tearing a small animal apart, blood on both of them. So the kibble must have given out, but that still wasn't

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important enough to those two creatures to cause them to let me out so that I could feed them.

Strangely, hungry as Rex must have been, he did not devour all the rabbit, but left part of it and trotted off around a corner of the house. In a moment Regina came capering around, full speed ahead, and fell on the meat that Rex had left for her. She glanced up once, as if to say, *See what you're missing?*—and went on with her meal.

They survive well.

I do not. I am unkempt, with no way to clean myself, and with hope deteriorating fast. I am hungry, I am growing thirsty again as the water slowly disappears from my bowl, and there is nothing to occupy my mind.

Except one thing: why are the dogs doing this to me? Revenge? Fear? Savagery? Mindless behavior of the jungle? No, not this last. Their behavior is not mindless . . .

My thoughts wander, then center on the one thing that is beginning to take over all that is left of my mind: *Why?* Rex could have killed me at any time, with one leap at my throat. He could have crunched my ankle when they were herding me upstairs. Regina could have torn my legs to shreds if she had wished. But instead they are keeping me here as a prisoner, not knowing or perhaps not caring, that I can die here, die on the wrong side of a door that can lead to freedom.

The thought keeps coming back, over and over again—for what else do I have to think about? They could have killed me at any time, so why didn't they? Because they need me to feed them in order to keep themselves alive? No. They are managing without me, they can survive without my ministrations, they are totally self-sufficient. Then why don't they kill me, any time I open the door, kill me and be done with it?

Finally I knew. The reason they didn't kill me outright was that then there would have to be an accounting. When their masters returned and found me dead in my room, they would not blame the dogs; they would only be sorry the dogs had been neglected while poor Susie lay dead of natural causes in their absence. But if I were found torn apart by their darlings' fangs, then there would be retribution, perhaps even execution. Like humans, I thought, the idea coming slowly and painfully into being—like humans. Like humans. *Do your deed, evade the consequences.*

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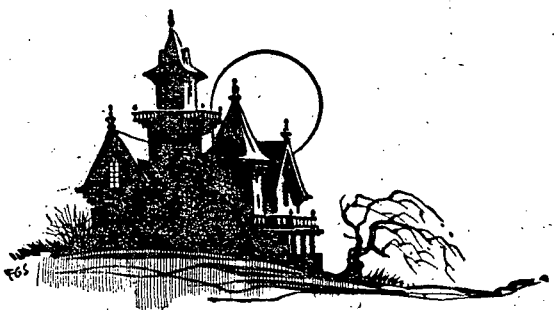
Monsters, I thought . . . and now the final grip on my sanity is going. Monsters. To let me die slowly, in torture, so that they will not be held accountable!

I ran to the door and beat on it, screaming, "Monsters! You beastly human monsters!"

On the other side of the door there was silence, except for a soft pattering, a soft movement, a soft sound, gentle but unyielding . . .



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THE NIECE FROM SCOTLAND

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

"Well, fancy meeting you again!" the pleasant stranger exclaimed, all flattering astonishment. (And about time, too, old girl! he thought to himself. Kept him hanging about a solid two hours for this "chance" encounter.)

Gladys had first met him last week here in The Green Man at the mouth of the cul-de-sac. She'd been sipping a dry sherry before going home to cope with her ladyship and he'd happened to sit down at the same table. Such a nice man! He'd seemed so interested in her, thought her far too good to be just a housekeeper, wanted to know all about where she worked and for whom. She'd soon found herself pouring out all her little personal troubles; if Gladys had a fault it was perhaps that she was rather too unreticent about the problems of life with Lady Blatchett.

And now here he was again, just dropped in for a quick one and insisted on her joining him. "Well, all right, but I *must* be home on the hour. If I'm not she locks the door and then hides the key and by the time

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she's had a couple of drinks, she can't find it again and I'm done for."

"Surely there must be other ways you could just nip in? You've got the run of the place. You could leave something unlocked."

"Unlocked! She goes over every door and window even when I'm there; you never know when she'll go round checking. If I *wasn't* there . . . I tell you," said Gladys, "the house is like a beleaguered castle." Guilelessly she described its inner fortifications. "She lives in terror, poor old thing, especially after dark."

It was all on account, it seemed, of Lady Blatchett's Past. She'd done something shady—fiddled a Trust or something—and so all the family money had come to her and now she went in fear of vengeance at the hands of cheated relatives. "Especially one of them. 'My niece from Scotland,' she calls her. It must have been the niece who should have got most of the money. She's built up this niece into some sort of terrible ogre; I really think she believes she'll be murdered in her bed." She supposed, said Gladys, that was what had turned her to drinking.

"A proper old lush, she sounds to me. I wonder you stay with her," said the sympathetic stranger.

A new look came into Gladys' sad middle-aged eyes. "I get very good wages. And I've got my poor brother, you see. I'm not having him put in any public institution. With his background and living with a lot of patients beneath his proper station—" She was back on a well-worn hobby-horse. Mr. "Smith" looked at his watch and warned her that the hour was approaching.

Patsy was waiting for Mr. "Smith" when he returned from seeing Gladys safely through the front door of Number 20, at the bottom of the cul-de-sac. Patsy looked exhilarated. Her blue eyes were shining, her feather-cap of dusty gold hair seemed to be standing on end with excitement and gaiety. "You look somewhat lit," he said, climbing into the driver's seat of the little car.

"Oh, Edgar, he's such a pet! And fallen for me like a ton of bricks; poor lamb—quite defenseless."

"You are speaking of Dr. Fable, I take it," said Edgar, not quite so pleasant now.

"At Number Ten—slap opposite Lady Blatchett's. We did agree, dear heart, that I should go to work on him?"

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"Well, you did go to work then? And it went off all right?"

"Like a bomb. I was the last patient, all as arranged. 'Stay and have a glass of sherry, my dear Miss Comfort?' 'Hey, hey,' I said, 'watch your doctor-patient relationship—it's slipping!' "

"Despite all this wit, however, you stayed for the sherry?"

"Yes, I stayed. And who else do you think stayed, too? The Desiccated Receptionist. Now, wasn't that a masterstroke? I made her join us; and now I've got not one of them eating out of my hand, but two." She wriggled complacently in her seat. "So how's about the housekeeper?"

Edgar told her his own news. "It's true all right, blast it! The place is like a fortress. Bolts, keys—I heard the very rattle of the chains as the drawbridge went up. And what's worse, they've got it so fixed that once inside you can't get out again. Self-locking doors and whatnot. You have to have special keys." Though why she should want to cage herself *in* with thieves and murderers, he couldn't imagine. "I tried advising dear Gladys to leave a few orifices open, but she literally dared not. The old woman lives in terror." He expanded on Lady Blatchett's reactions to her niece in Scotland.

"Oh, well, revenge is sweet, no doubt," said Patsy equably. "Personally, I'll be quite content with the pearls."

"You'll have to be—everything else she's got is kept in the bank vault," said Edgar.

Their plan went into operation the following evening. Gladys, patently rattled, answered the front door and beheld the friendly stranger from The Green Man. "Do forgive my disturbing you at such an hour—" he began.

"You shouldn't be calling here at any hour," said Gladys, glancing fearfully back to the closed drawing-room door.

"It was only that I mislaid my lighter last night. Sentimental value, you know; I couldn't bear to lose it. I wondered if by any chance you'd happened to notice—"

"I noticed nothing," said Gladys, beginning to close the door.

"It's nowhere in the pub. I suppose—" He had unconsciously moved a step forward so that she could do nothing without physically pushing him backward. "You couldn't possibly have picked it up, without thinking, and dropped it with your other things into your handbag?"

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In his anxiety the gentleman had begun—quite unconsciously again, of course—to raise his voice. Gladys glanced back over her shoulder again. "No, no, of course. No such thing!"

"If you wouldn't mind just looking? So sorry to trouble you."

"*Please* keep your voice down; she'll be coming out into the hall." Gladys dithered doubtfully. "Well, I'll just go and make sure."

She hurried off toward the kitchen and in her agitation she never thought of asking him to wait on the step outside. And extraordinary to relate, what he had suggested must have happened; for there at the bottom of her neat vinyl handbag was a rather cheap silver lighter.

He thanked her effusively and went away. She listened for a moment at the drawing-room door, but except for the clinking of glass against bottle all was peace.

Gladys' room was on the third floor; her ladyship never climbed that high—couldn't manage the stairs, these days; and one way and another Gladys had got it very comfortable and cosy. With an occasional glance down from the top landing to see that all was well, she spent the rest of the evening with her knitting and the television.

Patsy slipped out of the dining room, once Gladys was gone, and went quietly up to the second floor. She located her ladyship's bedroom—really, the amount Edgar had got out of that housekeeper!—and inspected the others. There were two unused rooms, their keys in the doors. She chose the more remote, went in, locked the door behind her, and put herself very comfortably to bed. There would be the whole night to wait; and who ever looked into a locked spare room?

At midnight Lady Blatchett, propelled by the patient Gladys, reeled uncertainly up to bed. She would remain there till lunchtime—so Gladys had confided to her sympathetic friend in the pub—"She never thinks *I've* got to get up, after waiting up for her till all hours!" Patsy did not hear them. She was snuggled up under the spare-room eiderdown, deep in untroubled slumber.

At eleven the next morning Gladys, according to her custom, inched open the bedroom door and peeked in, before going to the kitchen for coffee and a biscuit. Lady Blatchett was still fast asleep and snoring. The pearls were kept under her pillow but in her late-evening condition her ladyship hadn't been too careful about conceal-

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ing them; Gladys could see their gentle gleam, tumbled half out from under the crumpled linen. A choker of pearls, not many of them and not very large—but perfectly matched, they said, of a wonderful quality and worth a small fortune.

At that moment Gladys heard the milkman's knock and went down to the back door. Patsy had checked on this being settling-up day. Gladys would be kept occupied for several minutes.

Gladys came back into the house to hear muffled squeals and the sound of her ladyship's bell ringing violently. Lady Blatchett had been shocked awake to find her head and shoulders enveloped in a tangle of draperies; and by the time she managed to get free to summon help, the front door had closed and the pearls were gone.

Gladys spent some time in calming her ladyship's agitations, which centered largely on the threat of the niece from Scotland, and then she telephoned the police.

The station was at the mouth of the cul-de-sac, just opposite The Green Man; and a constable on duty outside was able to report that though many people had gone in and out of the cul-de-sac in the course of the morning, in the few minutes since the theft of the pearls, not a soul had left it. Unless egress had been effected through one of the other houses—which on a rapid mental reconnaissance seemed most unlikely—it was safe to assume that both the plunder and the plunderer were still safely bottled up inside. A police officer made good time to the scene of the crime.

Patsy, meanwhile, had trotted calmly out of the front door of Number 20 (it now being daylight, its defenses were down) and across to the front door of Number 10.

The Desiccated Receptionist was all of a flutter. "Oh, Miss Comfort, you're early."

"Am I?" said Patsy. "That's not like *me*. I'm usually late."

"Well, you aren't due today until half-past eleven."

"Oh, aren't I?" said Patsy. "Well, never mind. I'll just have to sit in your lovely waiting room and wait."

She was at leisure, therefore, to observe the antics of the patient who emerged from Dr. Fable's consulting room five minutes later and she could therefore describe them in full when the police subsequently made their inquiries.

In the interim, however, she had been in to see Dr. Fable and assure that infatuated practitioner that her headaches

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were, alas, no better. He showed no marked distress at this information and agreed that she'd have to come back several times—several times—for more treatment. Meanwhile: "Have you got another box of the pills for me, like you promised? Oh, you *are* a sweetie!—lovely sample ones again so I shan't have to pay for those either?"

He handed them over in their round white cardboard box, faintly rattling, the box plastic-covered and sealed. "It'll have to be a prescription after this, I'm afraid," he said. "That's the last of the lot they sent me. Let me know next time how much good they've done you."

"I'll make it an evening appointment and scrounge another drink from you," said Patsy, cheerfully departing. "With you and your nice Miss Hodge," she added, just loud enough for nice Miss Hodge to hear.

What with putting down her gloves on Miss Hodge's desk while she ruffled through her handbag for her diary, and riffling through the diary for a suitable date for the evening appointment, it was not surprising that when at last she left, in a near hysteria of jokes and farewells and thank-yous, Miss Comfort should have forgotten to take her box of pills with her. She was making such good time up the cul-de-sac that Miss Hodge could not catch her. The receptionist put the box on her shelf where it merged very nicely into the clutter of professional samples common to any doctor's office—and forgot all about them.

The police intercepted Patsy at the mouth of the cul-de-sac. She was highly entertained to learn of the theft of pearls from the house opposite the doctor's: just like on the telly, she said—weren't they all thrilled, right here under the nose of their own dear little police station, in their own dear little cul-de-sac? Was she a suspect? Were they going to search her? She simply longed to be searched—only promise not to tickle!

The police compromised by inviting her into their own dear little station where a young policewoman obliged with the searching. Neither Miss Comfort's charming person nor her handbag offered up anything of interest, except that, mixed up with the exotic clobber in the latter, there appeared a round white box of pills. The police broke the seal and glanced at the pills, even breaking one or two of them across; but they proved to be just pills. Since they showed so little eagerness,

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Patsy apparently thought it not worth while to mention that while one pillbox now appeared in her handbag, another had been left behind on Miss Hodge's desk. Instead she trailed a pretty little red herring.

"I suppose the thief must have been the funny man with the medicine?"

What funny man with what medicine?

"Well, he came out of Dr. Fable's examining room while I was waiting, but instead of leaving he sat down while Miss Hodge was busy with the next patient and pulled a bottle of pink medicine out of his pocket and started taking it. I mean, poured it down his throat straight out of the bottle."

Police interest perked up. The man was still in the station, having just come through, unscathed, a fairly thorough searching.

"Yes, and then he jumped up and went over to one of the pictures on the wall and began looking at it, terribly intent—I mean, sort of looking at the frame and feeling behind it in a funny sort of way. A frightful picture, too! Personally, I think Dr. Fable's got it upside-down, poor love. Perhaps the man thought so, too. Anyway, he took some more medicine and then went away."

The officers went away, too, legging it down the cul-de-sac as fast as they could. The picture was there all right and, upside-down or not, simply covered with glove prints, the gloves having been liberally dribbled over with the pink medicine. Apart from these, however, it all proved unrewarding.

There seemed little doubt about the genuineness of Lady Blatchett's loss. The police went about the busy elimination of suspects. Gladys the housekeeper had an unsullied ten-year record and a further twelve years to her credit of faithful if not devoted service to her ladyship.

Dr. Fable appeared to be a blameless practitioner, debonair and extremely well-to-do, hardly susceptible to suspicion of an elaborate and well-planned theft.

Desiccated Miss Hodge had been twenty years in the service of this doctor or that, without a blot on her escutcheon.

Inquiries in neighboring houses were in progress, of course; but meanwhile all that remained was the little clutch of patients. And one was Miss Comfort, limpidly innocent; one was an ultra-respectable mother-to-be from an address in Kensington; and the third was the funny man with the bottle

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of pink medicine. The police may be forgiven for concentrating with some intensity on the man, and since he had not gone at all into Miss Hodge's room, for saving this sanctum to the very last in their investigations of Dr. Fable's premises.

Miss Comfort slid up close to Miss Hodge as they sat awaiting dismissal from the police station. "I say, Miss Hodge, it's a little bit awkward. But I seem to have left my pills in your room."

"Yes, I found them," said Miss Hodge. "I put the box on my shelf."

"The thing is—well, it's because of Dr. Fable," said Patsy, raising troubled blue eyes to Miss Hodge's sharp, gray, elderly ones. "I mean, they're—well, you know, sort of pep pills. I don't think he really ought to have given them to me only I—I pleaded with him. I'm trying to fight it. I told him—well, he doesn't know I'm not supposed to be on them." She insisted: "It would be so awful if through helping me he got any kind of horrid publicity. You know how ugly it can be and the reporters will be swarming around here soon."

"What can *I* do about it?" said Miss Hodge.

"If you just wouldn't mention my having left them? Could you perhaps sort of whisk them out of sight before they start looking round your office?. It's for his sake, you know. I do like him so much. And I think you do, too?" said Patsy, half tender, half teasing.

"I'll see that it's all right," said Miss Hodge gruffly.

"And not say a word to him? I swore to him I wouldn't tell a soul, not even you."

"I'll keep it to myself," said Miss Hodge.

A further examination, increasingly penetrating, produced nothing in the man that might have been "taken internally" along with the pink medicine. His fingerprints on the other hand were highly revealing. For Mr. Smith, the agreeable stranger of The Green Man, proved to be none other than Edgar Snaith, jewel thief, with a long and unbeautiful history behind him.

He appeared to have arrived but recently in London, though he had a familiar face—and a set of fingerprints—farther up north. Usually he worked with accomplices, varying them frequently. Certainly he was not known ever to have associated with Dr. Fable, Miss Hodge, the pregnant patient, or Miss Comfort. He had, however, scraped up an acquaintance with the now deeply penitent Gladys (currently under notice

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of dismissal) and had certainly elicited from her a great deal of information about Lady Blatchett's ménage and regime.

Witnesses attested to his having been seen at Gladys' front door the previous evening, but agreed with her indignant avowal that he had been (almost) immediately sent away; and both Gladys and Lady Blatchett herself could testify to the pearls having been in her ladyship's possession long after he had gone. He had turned up at Dr. Fable's two mornings earlier, declaring himself the victim of mysterious pains, his regular doctor having been left behind when Snaith came south. He had been a little insistent on a second appointment being fixed for eleven o'clock this morning.

By this time it was not remarkable that the vivacious and gregarious Miss Comfort, still caged up—though with all courtesy—at the police station, had fallen into a chat with her fellow sufferers. The pink-medicine man, however, proved impervious to her blandishments. "A fine mess of things you've made for *me*, Miss! The pain come on frightful and I took a swig of me stuff to ease it. What else do I carry it around for? And as for the picture, it's my belief he's got it upside-down, so I was trying to see how it'd look if I righted it."

Miss Comfort sh'sh'd him, to the great disappointment of everyone else present, and his voice died away to a reproachful grumble. Miss Comfort seemed to be defending her actions. In fact, she was whispering, "It all went fine, Edgar. The Desiccated One's got them. You've drawn off the hunt beautifully."

"When can you get hold of them?"

"As soon as the police stop harassing *you*. And they soon must—there's nothing to hold you on. Get in touch like we arranged and we can get on with it."

"No tricks meanwhile," warned Edgar.

"Of course not," said Patsy warmly. And she meant it. He deserved his share.

When some days later she judged the time was ripe, she went back to Dr. Fable's office. Miss Hodge was in the act of shrugging on her outdoors coat. "The doctor's left, I'm afraid."

Patsy knew that. She had not come to see Dr. Fable.

Miss Hodge took off her coat and led the way back to her room. "You've come for the pills?"

"I've tried to hold out. But the craving—it's terrible," said Patsy, going into her act. "I just

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simply must have them."

"No doubt," said Miss Hodge. She had turned and now half sat on the edge of her desk and was looking straight at Patsy. "You see, Miss Comfort, I know what the pills are."

Patsy played for time. "Well, I explained to you—"

"I mean I know that they're *not* pills," said Miss Hodge.

"Oh," said Patsy. It did seem rather final.

"You see," said Miss Hodge, "you made one small mistake. Yes, I am in love with Dr. Fable; to anyone of your age, no doubt that's very amusing. But it does mean something: it means that Dr. Fable knows he can trust me, that I'd never ever let him down. He would never in his life have warned you not to tell *me*."

So she'd looked in the box But having looked there, reflected Patsy, taking heart, she had done nothing—hadn't gone at once to the police. Perhaps even the Miss Hodges of this world had their price? "Have you told this to anyone?" Patsy asked.

"No, I haven't," said Miss Hodge. (Was the glass of sherry paying dividends?) "I thought —well, you have shown yourself very—friendly—towards me, Miss Comfort. And I know Lady Blatchett, she's a patient of ours—and I know she's a horrid old woman. So I thought I'd wait and hear your side of the story."

"Let's sit down and have a nice natter, Miss Hodge," said Patsy, and she began to explain. "You see, Lady Blatchett is my aunt. And when my uncle died she sort of fiddled things—nothing illegal that anyone could get hold of—just worked on our doddering old family solicitor till she'd done us out of something like twenty thousand pounds. Well, that was too bad; but now my father's dead and my mother's ill—so beautiful, she is, Miss Hodge, and still quite young—and so dreadfully ill! And twenty thousand pounds—or ten thousand or five, for that matter—might make all the difference in her living a little longer and living that little in comfort. So . . .

"Well, one day our little house in Scotland was burgled and I caught the thief—no one more surprised than I was, unless it was him!—and I locked him up in a room. And then, instead of sending for the police, I had a little chat with him. I mean, suddenly I saw that if I could bring in a professional I might get some of my own back—and I do mean that, Miss Hodge," said Patsy, "get my *own* back. The pearls would be only a part of the value of what she's robbed us

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of. So we went into partnership. His name, no doubt you realize, was Edgar Snaith."

And Patsy went off into fits of giggles describing the alternative plans she and Edgar had devised for drawing the fire of the police. "*He's* safe enough. He never touched the pearls, and they can't pin anything on him for drinking pink medicine and staring at a picture. Unless, of course," she asked, raising her sweet blue eyes, half alarmed, half smiling, "you're going to give us away?"

"You mean," said Miss Hodge, "that I'm simply to hand over the pearls to you!"

Patsy half opened her mouth to propose a cut, but knew better and closed it again. "Would you—please?" she said.

Miss Hodge got up and fetched the round white box with its green lettering. She sat nursing it in her hand. Then she suggested pleasantly, "Fifty-fifty?"

"Fifty-fifty!" said Patsy.

"Twenty-five percent for you and the same for Mr. Snaith. The other half to me."

Patsy made a wild snatch at the box. It was empty. "I was expecting that," said Miss Hodge. She added that Miss Comfort need not worry; the pearls were quite safe—but not where Miss Comfort could ever find them.

"Fifty-*fifty?*" said Patsy.

"Make up your mind," said Miss Hodge.

Patsy's quick little mind shifted—she had spotted a discrepancy. "Possession is nine points of the law," she said. "You have possession of the pearls. Why divvy up? Why not scoop the lot for yourself?"

"I am not an habitual criminal," said Miss Hodge simply. "I wouldn't know how to dispose of them."

"Impasse," said Patsy.

"Impasse," agreed Miss Hodge.

And yet, not quite.

"Possession's nine points of the law," said Patsy again. "But the law will not allow you to keep possession of Lady Blatchett's pearls. Suppose I cut my losses and inform the police?"

"You do just that," said Miss Hodge, growing alarmingly less desiccated every minute, "and see where it will get you."

"It won't get me anywhere, except one up on *you*. And if I can't have my proper share of the pearls that'll do next best for me. Twenty-five percent of what a fence will give for them!—it'll be worth that much to me to see you doing time. And don't think you won't. You can say what you like to them about me—I haven't got them, I'm in the clear; they don't even know I know Edgar.

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"But Edgar was at that house last night and he was here the next morning. You wait till Edgar starts coming clean to the police—how you bribed him to take care of the sale of the pearls, which you'd already stolen on one of the old woman's visits here, replacing them with false ones; perfectly easy while the doctor was examining the patient. You'd have told Edgar to look for them behind the picture frame," said Patsy, warming to her theme, "and to swallow them down with some medicine and so smuggle them out."

Patsy shrugged. "Lots of holes, but Edgar will stop them up, never fear! He's a past-master, is Edgar, at conning the police. And there'll still be nothing against him—he won't ever have touched the pearls; he'll tell them you have them, and that'll be true. And against me—also nothing."

"Except, of course," said Miss Hodge, "that the most casual inquiry will reveal that you are the niece from Scotland, with a grudge against Lady Blatchett and a well-founded conviction that whatever she possesses is rightfully yours."

"Oh, that!" said Patsy. "No dice there, I'm afraid, love! You didn't really fall for that, did you?"

"Well, no," said Miss Hodge. "You cooked it all up on the spur of the moment from what poor Gladys had confided to your friend, Mr. Snaith. You thought such a story must surely win my sentimental spinster's heart and that I'd turn over the pearls to you."

"But you didn't believe it?"

"Lady Blatchett is an old woman," said Miss Hodge. "So odd for her to have a niece of your generation, especially as your poor dying mother is still so young." She smiled at Miss Comfort with the smile of a crocodile. "So much more likely, don't you think, that the niece from Scotland is by now at least a middle-aged woman."

Miss Comfort saw the light immediately. "Like you?"

"That's right, my dear," said Miss Hodge. "Like me."

The niece from Scotland: obliged to earn her own living, wangling herself at last with her excellent references into a position where she might observe the old aunt at close quarters, might even ingratiate herself into her favor. The older one became, the more frequent one's visits to the doctor—chosen because his office was so conveniently just across the way—and the more necessary the attentions of the doctor's kindly receptionist.

Miss Comfort bowed to

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necessity. "*You* are the niece from Scotland."

"And *you* are a professional thief," said Miss Hodge, "and that's that." She rose, dusted her charmless dress. "So I think fifty-fifty is a very fair division. Where do we begin?" she said.

At Number 20, Lady Blatchett rang the bell for Gladys. She continued a serial lecture on the sins and follies of careless talk in public. "But I have decided after all to retain you."

Gladys was not exactly astonished; not for nothing had she made herself indispensable over all these years. She said, "Thank you, my lady."

"I have had a nice check from the insurance people, so I feel rather better."

"Oh, I *am* glad," said Gladys, much relieved. "Now your ladyship can have some pearls again." Then she said humbly, for in some mysterious way the theft was acknowledged to have been all her fault, "Always seeing you with them—I've missed them, my lady."

"I hadn't intended—" But Lady Blatchett looked into the mirror. "Perhaps I do need something."

Bare, ancient, crêpey throat, where the dewlap hung unlovely and the "bracelets" deepened with each succeeding year.

"I was even thinking that your ladyship might get a double row, this time. You'll never match the last, I know, but perhaps two rows not quite so good—?"

Her ladyship thought that might be a good idea. After all, a nice bit of jewelry was better for her, really, than all that money lying in the bank.

Better for Gladys, too. What a blessing the burglary had been! Not that she hadn't been, for simply ages, working toward something of the sort—all that carefully indiscreet talk in the pub! She'd been beginning to feel a bit desperate by the time Mr. "Smith" turned up; the money from the first pearls wouldn't last forever—and if she died for it, her poor brother wasn't going to be moved to some public institution where he wouldn't have his proper privacy; a man of his background mixing with just ordinary patients—no, it just wouldn't do.

Behind the shop front of a respectable jeweler's, Miss Hodge, Miss Comfort, and Mr. Snaith stood aghast at an offer of £25 for some nice cultured pearls; and up in her comfortable room Lady Blatchett's well-paid housekeeper was writing off to an address in Scotland.

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a NEW Dr. Coffee medical mystery by

LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

The newest Dr. Coffee novelet is one of the best in the series about the pathologist-detective of Pasteur Hospital, Northbank, U.S.A. Once again the 'tec team of Lieutenant Max Ritter and Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee tackle an unusual mystery, but this time Ritter has a personal stake in the outcome. His sister's adopted son is a Vietnamese orphan named Nguyen Quong-trang, now called Jake. The boy was first brought up as a Buddhist, then as a Catholic, and is now attending Jewish, Protestant, and Quaker schools; even more important, he has an extremely high I.Q. Can such a boy, with such a background (each foster parent is a Ph.D.), be a juvenile delinquent? . . .

DR. COFFEE AND THE WHIZ KID

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee sat before his microscope diagnosing tissue from Thursday's surgery when Detective Lieutenant Max Ritter stalked into the pathology laboratory at Pasteur Hospital with another man in tow.

"Hi, Doc," said the Northbank Police Department's tallest and skinniest homicide specialist. "Meet Detective Sergeant Kendall."

Dr. Coffee looked up to behold a husky prognathous redhead twice as broad but only two-thirds as tall as Ritter. The sergeant extended a bear's paw of a hand.

"Meetcha," said the sergeant.

"Greetings." The pathologist reflected that any number of forward-passing quarterbacks would envy that hand. "What's up, Max?"

"My sister's young kid Jake," Ritter said. "He ain't here?"

"He was, but he's long

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gone." Dr. Coffee frowned. "He should have reached home hours ago."

"He never got there," said Ritter.

"Disappeared," said Sergeant Kendall.

Dr. Coffee arose suddenly. A feeling of vague foreboding passed over him like a breath of cold wind. He had experienced the same uneasiness the day before when he had first heard about Max's young nephew Jake. Good lord, was it really only yesterday, less than twenty-four hours ago, that Ritter had come to get him in a police car?

There had been no reason for the uneasiness, unless it was his feeling that he was not really doing Ritter a favor. When the pathologist got into the car parked in front of the hospital, Ritter had said to him, "I sure appreciate this, Doc. And my mother will kiss you. Or anyhow bake you some of that strudel you like."

"It's absolutely crazy, Max." Dr. Coffee had shaken his head. "I won't be able to do anything for the boy. He should see a good psychiatrist, or at least a clinical child psychologist. I'm a lab man, Max, and what can—?"

"Don't argue!" The detective put the car in gear. "For mama you're a wizard. Ever since you cured her black Chow-dog tongue by telling her to stop taking bismuth tablets, she thinks you can do anything. And when she heard your wife was out of town visiting relatives this week, she insisted you come to dinner, and she'll invite my sister and her husband to come and bring the kid so you can see him. You know you can't cross mama."

The car stopped for a red light.

"I don't recall your ever talking about your sister before," Dr. Coffee said.

"We've never been what you might call palsy-walsy," Ritter had said. "She's ten years older and she was always papa's pet when the old man was alive. She went east to college. She got a Pee Aitch Dee come louder, a Phi Bait key, and a husband. I'm just a high-school dropout. Besides, Esther says I'm practically a goy."

The light turned green.

Dr. Coffee had known little about the bachelor detective's family life except that he was devoted to his widowed mother. He had only then learned that Max's older sister Esther was married to a professor of comparative religion at Northbank State College—a Dr. Irving Liebman with degrees from Vienna, the Sorbonne, and Oxford; the professor had been teaching at Columbia when

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Esther Ritter was getting her doctorate. The couple had adopted a Vietnamese orphan named Nguyen Quong-trang who for obvious reasons became Irving Liebman, Junior on his adoption papers, but whom everyone but his parents called "Jake."

"Tell me more about Jake," said Dr. Coffee, as Ritter swung north toward the once-stylish Heights neighborhood, now rapidly becoming a Northbank backwater. The detective had obliged.

It seemed that the Liebmans had adopted Jake through the intercession of a U.S. Army chaplain, Captain Amos Misch, who had once been rabbi of Northbank's Temple Beth Israel, and who had insisted that Jake was half Jewish. His reputed and unmarried father, the chaplain had said, was a Northbank man named Joe Straus, one of the first American advisers in Vietnam. Although a noncombatant, Straus had nevertheless been blown up by a land mine.

"Myself, I got doubts about Joe Straus being Jake's father," Ritter said, "because Jake is very bright—a whiz kid, you might say—and Joe Straus wasn't. I went to school with Joe and any brains he could pass on to a kid you could put in a thimble and have room left over for a dime's worth of bubble gum. Joe was what my mother would call a first-class schlemiel, and I ain't surprised he got blown up."

"But little Jake is a genius?"

"You'll see. If only he didn't have this—this thing I'm telling you about."

"He steals?"

"He steals. He says he can't help it. He admits he knows better but he says the urge is too strong for him."

"I could recommend a behavior therapist who deals with compulsions like that," the pathologist said. "It may be a conditioned reflex he picked up in Vietnam."

Ritter shook his head as he turned into a tree-lined street. "Jake ain't one of them wild street kids. His ma died shortly after Joe was killed, but she first left the kid with a Catholic orphanage. But you'll see for yourself. Here we are, Doc."

The police car stopped in the driveway of a two-storey frame house. The white paint was peeling from the clapboards and the Victorian gingerbread that garlanded the eaves, but the red geraniums in the window boxes bloomed brightly and the curtains at the windows were stiffly immaculate.

"Come in, come in, Doctor. You are an angel to come. How is your good wife?"

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"She's fine, Mrs. Ritter."

Mrs. Ritter was difficult to pigeonhole. Dr. Coffee would never have taken her for the mother of a high-ranking police detective. She certainly was not the caricature of the stereotyped Jewish mother, and he could not picture her as the mother of a scholarly female doctor of philosophy whose dissertation was entitled "The Interrelation of Climate and the Russian Novel as a Major Influence on the October Revolution."

Ma Ritter was plump and rather short. Her pink scalp glowed through the bluish tinge of thinning white hair. Her old-fashioned-length dark dress was probably homemade, but it was not dowdy. She moved with a certain grace.

"Please sit down, Doctor. My daughter and her family will be a little late. She just phoned. You'll take a glass of wine in the meantime?"

"No, mama, no!" Ritter made a panic gesture. "Doc can't drink that sweet Concord grape stuff. He breaks out in hives."

"Don't talk foolishness, Max." Mrs. Ritter smiled apologetically to the pathologist. "Max is such a joker."

"No joke, mama. Kosher wine gives him boils. I got a bottle of honest poison in my room. I'll fix him up."

When the detective had disappeared, his mother said, "I hope you can help little Jake, Doctor. Did Max tell you how worried I am?"

"I'm sure he'll be all right, Mrs. Ritter."

"Unless that judge decides to send him away. Didn't Max tell you? If it wasn't for Max they would send him to some farm for juvenile delinquents."

Max Ritter returned juggling two drinks and his mother's glass of wine.

"To your good health, Mrs. Ritter." Ice tinkled as Dr. Coffee raised his glass. He scowled at Ritter reproachfully. "Max, you didn't tell me the boy had been arrested."

The detective's Adam's apple bobbed twice in his long neck, and a slow flush mounted to the tips of his outsize ears. "It's just a formality," he said. "The kid was released in my custody. Kendall couldn't help himself, so he went through the motions—"

"Who's Kendall?" Dr. Coffee interrupted.

"A detective sergeant. You don't know him. He was with the pickpocket squad in Chicago before he did a trick in Asia with the Marines. Then he came here. He catches odd jobs when he ain't karate instructor to the force."

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"Karate?"

"All Northbank cops got to learn the fundamentals now," Ritter said. "And Kendall is a Black Belt. He can break two one-inch planks with a bare-handed chop or an elbow smash. Anyhow, Kendall got a call from Jimmy Jamaica—"

"Hold on, Max, you've lost me again. Who's Jimmy Jamaica?"

"He's the blind man who owns this candy and stationery store across from Jake's school, the place Jake's been stealing chocolate bars from."

"You mean Jamaica called in the police just because a boy took some candy?"

"Not the first time, Doc. This is going on quite a while. At first Jimmy Jamaica boxed his ears when he caught him. Then he took him to the principal of the school and said next he'd call the cops. The principal called Jake's father and the kid promised he wouldn't do it again, but he broke his promise."

"Max, he's only a child," Mrs. Ritter interrupted. "So he forgot his promise."

"Mama, he didn't forget. He's got a brain like Einstein. Something's wrong with the kid. You know it yourself since you asked me to bring Doc to look him over. Wait till you see him, Doc."

As if on cue, the front doorbell played a lively tune and the door opened. While Irving Liebman, Junior's finger was still on the bell button, his family entered. Esther Ritter Liebman appeared first, apologizing for being late—the boy was taking a nap and they didn't want to wake him. She and her brother had obviously not inherited their dominant genes from the same parent. While Ritter was lean and angular, his sister was short and plump. She wore a blonde wig, a superior smile, and a Phi Beta Kappa key suspended on a gold chain above her ample bosom.

Professor Liebman was not much taller but he was better proportioned. His silky black beard curled slightly above his blue polka-dot bow tie and his stern eyes peered through thick spectacles with octaganal gold rims. He bowed slightly from the waist in pre-Anschluss-Vienna fashion.

The youngster was still playing a tune on the doorbell while the preliminary introductions were made. A sharp "Irving" from his foster father reminded him that he was expected inside.

"Hello," the boy said, pressing the palms of his hands together with the fingertips pointing to his chin. Then he solemnly shook hands all

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around. He was an appealing lad. Although his Eurasian origin was evident in some of his features, his black eyes were distinctly non-Asiatic. They were big and wondering, and the lids lacked the Mongolian fold.

"Irving, Dr. Coffee is a pathologist," said Professor Liebman. "Do you know what a pathologist is?"

"Sure," said the boy. "He tries to find out what makes people sick, and if they die anyhow, he takes them apart to find out why."

"His English has a fine American accent," said Dr. Coffee.

"He speaks French and Vietnamese, and he's learning German," said his foster mother proudly.

"He's going to study Russian next year," the professor added. "He wants to enter the foreign service."

"Last month he wanted to be a big-league ball player," said Ritter. "Did the Mets win today, Jake?"

"Not yet," the boy said. "They play the Giants on the coast tonight, but they should win. Seaver's pitching."

"Who's leading the National League in batting, Jake?" Ritter continued. "Willie Mays?"

The boy stuck his tongue out at the detective. "You're kidding me. You know Mays hasn't led the league since 1954. It's Pete Rose right now. He's hitting .348."

"In March he wanted to be an astronaut," said Professor Liebman. "How far away is the moon, Irving?"

"At its apogee, 252,710 miles."

"Don't ask him if he knows Einstein's equation," said Ritter, "because he'll tell you, and I bet even Esther don't understand it."

"As long as he doesn't grow up to be a cop like his Uncle Max," Esther Liebman said.

"Please everybody come in the dining room," said Mrs. Ritter. "Max, you'll carve the chicken. The matzo balls I made especially for you, Doctor Coffee, even if it isn't Passover. Max said you raved about them when you were here last time."

Dr. Coffee did indeed appreciate the culinary skills of Mama Ritter. Although a zealous votary of the more sophisticated aromatic spectrum of classical *haute cuisine*, he had a great liking for the subtle variations of good uncomplicated fare. After all, what could an Escoffier or a Prosper Montagné do to a roasting chicken to improve the succulence of Mama Ritter's bird?

Dr. Coffee did not let his

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gastronomic enjoyment distract him from the primary purpose of his visit. He watched intently every mouthful consumed by the young Eurasian kleptomaniac, if such he was. He was particularly interested by the gusto with which the boy attacked Mama Ritter's apple strudel.

"You like dessert, don't you, Jake?" he asked. "Cookies and ice cream?"

"You bet."

"And candy?".

A peculiar look came over the boy's face. He was suddenly on his guard. He nodded, but said nothing.

"Your Uncle Max tells me you've been taking candy from a store near your school," Dr. Coffee pursued, "without paying for it." Again the boy nodded. His lower lip advanced slightly. "Why is that?"

"I didn't have any money. And anyhow, other kids do the same thing and they don't get in trouble."

"Don't you get any sweets at home?"

"He gets plenty of sweets," Esther Liebman broke in. "We eat desserts regularly."

"Do you give him candy?" Dr. Coffee redirected his question.

"Certainly, once in a while," replied Professor Liebman. "Too much candy is not good for a boy whose teeth are still forming. Isn't that so, Doctor?"

Dr. Coffee made a noncommittal gesture. He seemed preoccupied with Mama Ritter's strudel.

"He certainly knows right from wrong," said Esther Liebman defensively, as if someone had accused her of faulty upbringing. "We certainly haven't neglected the moral or spiritual side of his education, have we, Irving?"

"The boy has been subjected to ethical bombardment from all sides." Professor Liebman pointed the tip of his beard in Dr. Coffee's direction as he made the announcement. "He was first brought up as a Buddhist, then as a Catholic. We want him to know something of our own faith, naturally, but he sometimes attends a Protestant Sunday school with a classmate. We want to expose him to all religions, and when he gets old enough to understand them, to choose the one he finds most compatible."

"More strudel, Doctor?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Ritter. It's delicious, but—"

"Just a little piece. No? Then Esther, will you please serve the coffee."

Dr. Coffee watched the boy's eyes follow the strudel as it disappeared into the kitchen.

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He leaned across the table and said, "Jake, tomorrow's Saturday, so you don't go to school—right?"

"This Saturday we were planning to go to a Quaker meeting," Professor Liebman volunteered.

"Then perhaps, Professor, you could bring the boy to Pasteur Hospital instead?"

"Hospital?" Mama Ritter was alarmed. "Why do you have to put him in the hospital?"

"Only for an hour, Mrs. Ritter, in my laboratory. With his parents' permission I'd like to make a few tests."

"I'd be glad to bring him, Doctor."

"He doesn't have to take me," said Jake. "Like I'll come by myself. I've never seen a laboratory. What are you going to do to me?"

"Nothing that will hurt." Dr. Coffee tried his best to remember the bedside manner from his intern days—how long ago was it? Good lord, twenty, thirty years! "Maybe I'll take a sample of your blood."

"Blood?" echoed Mama Ritter. "What for?"

"Just a few drops."

"Wow!" said Jake. "Will you teach me how to do it?"

"Certainly," Dr. Coffee smiled. "Come before lunch. Say about noon, pathology lab, fifth floor, Pasteur Hospital."

"He'll be there, I promise," said Professor Liebman.

In the police car Dr. Coffee said, "Max, do you suppose that candy store is still open?"

"Could be," said Ritter. "Jimmy Jamaica lives upstairs. We can try."

"I'd like to stop off there, if you don't mind. Is the man really blind?"

"He sees a little out of one eye—enough to catch kids that swipe his Creamy Crunch and Chunky Chucknuts. And what he don't see, Maggie Dorwin sees for him. She's his housekeeper and sorta takes care of him."

"Do you think Jake is telling the truth—that Jamaica lets some kids get away with stealing candy but cracks down on Jake exclusively?"

"If you mean is Jimmy Jamaica a racist who don't like Jake because he's half Jewish and half Vietnamese, the answer is no. Jake's special playmates, the ones he says get away with swiping stuff, are mostly blacks and Latins. What are you going to test the kid for tomorrow, Doc?"

"I'd rather not speculate, Max."

"But you think he's got something wrong?"

"Let's say I suspect something's wrong physically."

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"Hope it's not serious," Ritter said. "I like that kid. He's going to grow up to be really somebody if that sister of mine and her trained poodle don't ruin him."

The police car turned a corner at the Calvin Coolidge Grammar School and drew up in front of the two-storey frame building that was Jimmy Jamaica's Scholastic Candy and Stationery Store. There was a light burning inside when Ritter braked to a stop, but the store went dark as he switched off the ignition. He and Dr. Coffee got out of opposite sides of the car.

The front door of the shop was locked. Ritter rattled the knob, played a toccata and fugue on the doorbell, then banged gently on glass panel with the flashlight he was carrying. When there was no response, he sent the flashlight beam through the glass to explore the darkness inside. In about a minute an apparition loomed in the circle of light—a blue-eyed Medusa head with a frightening halo of bright red curlers.

"We're closed," shouted the Medusa through the glass. "What do you want?"

"Tell Jimmy Jamaica that Lieutenant Ritter wants to see him."

"Jimmy's gone to bed." The Medusa made no move to open the door.

"Get him down. Tell him I want to speak to him."

The apparition vanished from the circle of brightness.

"Who's the gorgon?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"Gorgon? I guess you mean Maggie Dorwin. She's Jimmy Jamaica's seeing-eye dog and whatnot. Ain't she a dish?"

The pathologist chuckled.

It was several minutes before an emaciated elderly man with an incongruously developed potbelly shuffled up to the glass door and into the field of Ritter's flashlight. He wore dark glasses. He was in his undershirt and his suspenders hung down outside his trousers.

"What do you want?" he shouted through the door.

"Open up, Jimmy. Dr. Coffee here wants to talk to you about my sister's kid."

"I got nothing more to say about that thieving little brat. He ain't my worry no more. Tell your friend to talk to Sergeant Kendall. It's his baby now."

"Quit stalling, Jimmy. Let us in."

"You got a warrant?" Maggie Dorwin's Medusa head reappeared over Jamaica's shoulder.

"Come on, Jimmy. You know we don't need a warrant

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to talk to you. Open up."

"You got to have a warrant this time of night. I know my constitutional rights. I got the right—"

"I know, I know. The Fourth Amendment. You got a right to be secure in your house and person against unreasonable search and seizure. Well, we ain't gonna search or seize—"

Ritter stopped when he realized he was talking to the dark. Jimmy Jamaica and Maggie Dorwin had withdrawn from the searching beam of his light.

"Shall I bust in?" Ritter asked.

"Don't bother. We can talk to him after I've run my tests. Drive me home now, Max, and I'll give you a brandy."

Jake Liebman, né Nguyen Quong-trang, arrived at Dr. Coffee's laboratory next day promptly, out of breath, and wide-eyed with excited curiosity.

"Hey, this is groovy!" he exclaimed as he looked around at the mysterious chromium apparatus and glistening glassware. "I've never been in a lab before."

The boy leaned against a wall.

"You're all in, Jake," Dr. Coffee said. "Did you walk over here?"

"No. My father drove me to the hospital. But I missed the elevator and I was afraid I'd be late, so I ran up the stairs."

"Do you get tired like this often?"

"No. Well, sometimes before dinner I lie down and read. What's that round thing there?"

"That's a centrifuge."

"What's it for?"

"It spins test tubes around several thousand times a minute. It separates things—like a cream separator. It separates bacteria from spinal fluid, blood cells from the serum—"

"Are you going to spin some of my blood in there?"

"Not today, Jake. I'm going to put a little of your blood in that machine over there. It's a photoelectric colorimeter."

"What does it do?"

"It has an electronic eye that looks at your blood and tells us how much of everything is in it."

"Like what? Don't you already know what's in everybody's blood?"

"Not the precise amounts, Jake. For instance, I don't know exactly how much sugar you've got in your blood."

"So that's it again." The boy's face darkened. He looked at the floor. "You don't need the machine for that. I already told about stealing the candy. I think I'll go home."

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"Now wait a minute, Jake—"

"You're trying to get me to, you know, squeal on somebody else, but I won't. I don't tell on other people. Not ever."

"I think we understand each other." The pathologist held out his hand. "Shake. I'm just trying to help you and I think this whole business will be cleared up this afternoon."

The boy silently took his hand.

"Jake, I want you to meet Dr. Mookerji." Dr. Coffee presented his pear-shaped resident pathologist. "He's from India."

The boy stared at Dr. Mookerji's pink turban as he shook the plump brown hand of the man from Calcutta.

"Am delighted to meet fellow Asian," said Dr. Mookerji.

"I knew a man from India," said Jake. "He was the watchman at the orphanage in Saigon. But he had, you know, a red turban and whiskers. Why don't you have whiskers?"

"Watchman was no doubt Sikh," said Dr. Mookerji. "Personally am Bengali."

"If you'll go with Dr. Mookerji, Jake," said Dr. Coffee, "he'll introduce you to that pretty girl over there in a white smock—her name is Doris Hudson. They'll take a sample of your blood and then you can go home. Should I call your Uncle Max to come by for you?"

"I'll take the bus. I've got my school tickets."

Dr. Coffee considered giving the boy an injection of glucose before he left, but instead handed him a chocolate bar to eat on the way home.

When he dialed the number of Professor Irving Liebman, Ph.D., Dr. Coffee had the colorimeter readings in front of him.

"Professor, you won't have to worry any more about your boy stealing candy. That was a purely physiological response."

"Don't you mean *psychological*, Doctor?"

"*Physiological*. His body has an overwhelming hunger for sugar. He has a mild case of hypoglycemia—or hyperinsulinism, if you'd rather."

"That sounds terrible. What is it?"

"He has an overactive pancreas—diabetes in reverse, you might call it. His blood sugar is below normal. His pancreas secretes more insulin than he can use, and it burns up too much of the blood sugar he needs for energy. And since you people probably ration his sweets at home, he instinctively replaces the missing energy by stealing and eating candy."

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"Curious. But is this hypoglycemia serious?"

"Probably not, if it's treated. If you'll give me the name of your family physician I'll tell him about my preliminary findings, which are only indicative. He'll probably want to run a glucose tolerance test for a more extensive diagnosis, and of course he'll want to rule out certain other possibilities. Meanwhile let the boy eat sweets, particularly when he's tired."

"Thank you, Doctor Coffee. Is Irving still with you?"

"He should be home at any minute now. He took the bus."

But the boy did not get home "at any minute now." In fact, he had not reached home by 4:30 when Max Ritter barged into the pathology lab with Sergeant Kendall in tow.

"How long since the kid left here?" Ritter asked.

Dr. Coffee turned to Doris Hudson who sat beside him at the microscope, a notebook in her lap. "Two hours, Doris?"

"More than three, Doctor."

"Sergeant Kendall and I stopped by the place fifteen minutes ago and he wasn't home yet. My sister and that egghead she lives with are ready to climb walls."

"The juvenile probation people want to talk to him," said Sergeant Kendall. "We think we can fix things up."

"You'd better let me go along. I can explain the whole matter." The pathologist told the detectives about the boy's "diabetes in reverse," and added, "You might say his petty larceny was dictated by nature's need to correct his blood-sugar deficiency."

"Sure, come along if you want," Ritter said. "But we better find the kid first. My sister is going nuts."

"Where would you look first?" Dr. Coffee asked. "He told me he was going right home on the bus."

Sergeant Kendall made a funny face. "I know where I'd look," he said. "Jimmy Jamaica's joint."

"Why Jamaica's?"

"To get even with the old buzzard for blowing the whistle on him."

"You think a kid his age would nurse that kind of grudge?"

Sergeant Kendall's red eyebrows expressed surprise that his thesis should even be questioned. "Sure. He's half gook."

"Let's start there anyhow," Ritter said.

Jimmy Jamaica's front door was still locked. A sign inside the glass that read "Closed" offered no further explanation.

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"Maybe he's closed Saturdays because there's no school," Dr. Coffee suggested.

Ritter banged on the door and rattled the knob. "He must be here. He phoned me about an hour ago, a little before Kendall came by to pick me up."

"Why did he phone you?"

"I dunno. He says drop in this afternoon, I got something to talk to you about. Shall we call the Safe and Loft Squad or have you got your Open-sesame with you?"

Sergeant Kendall produced a bunch of keys and in two minutes the door was open.

In four minutes Lieutenant Ritter was telephoning to the technicians of the Homicide Squad.

Jimmy Jamaica lay on his back behind his candy counter, one hand above his head, the other hand resting in a scatter of cigarettes and Bonbon Bars. Even before Dr. Coffee had confirmed the absence of vital signs, it was obvious he was dead.

Dr. Coffee made a quick, if illegal, examination of the body before the photographers and fingerprint men arrived. He found no apparent bullet wound, no blood, no visible signs of brute force. He tried lifting the outstretched arm. It resisted him.

"Funny," Ritter commented. "He's already in rigor mortis, but he was alive only an hour ago."

"Then one of two things must have happened," said the pathologist. "Either it was someone else who phoned you, pretending to be Jamaica, or he died in a convulsion or while struggling. In the latter case rigor mortis sets in very quickly, sometimes in less than an hour."

"If you want to do an autopsy," Ritter said, "I'll fix it with the coroner. Anyhow, we still gotta find Jake."

"What about the woman who was here last night?" the pathologist asked.

"Maggie Dorwin," Ritter said. "She's got a room upstairs."

"She's not there." Sergeant Kendall snapped his fingers. "I know several places she might be at. Here comes your crew, Max, so I'll go pick her up. I'll bring her to headquarters."

When the experts got into high gear with their paraphernalia, Ritter and Dr. Coffee climbed the stairs to the second-floor apartment. They did not find Maggie Dorwin there. Neither did they find Irving Liebman, Jr., né Nguyen Quong-trang. What they did find surprised and puzzled them.

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In the room that was obviously Jimmy Jamaica's there was a disarray of empty bottles under an unmade bed, dirty clothes piled in corners, three white canes stuck in a wastebasket, a dozen wrist watches carelessly strewn on a dresser top. The dresser drawers revealed, in addition to socks and underwear, more wrist watches of all sorts.

On the floor of a kitchenette a bag of groceries had been dropped. The bag had burst, spilling out a carton of milk, a loaf of bread, a package of bacon, a tin of coffee, a cellophane sheath of sliced cheese.

There was a definitely feminine accent in the second bedroom—jars and bottles of cosmetic preparations on the dressing table—but both men were goggle-eyed over what they saw in the open suitcases on the bed. One of them was cluttered with nylon stockings, panty hose, women's gloves, and dozens of transistor radios. In the other was a jumble of petit-point handbags, bottles of perfume, and embroidered lingerie. On a shelf in the closet was a cardboard box full of rings, brooches, and earrings.

Dr. Coffee, bending over the suitcases on the bed, suddenly straightened and ran his long fingers through his tousled mop of sandy hair. There was a shadow of apprehension in his gray eyes as he became aware of the possible significance of what they had just discovered. He could not pinpoint all the ramifications, but the same feeling of cold foreboding he had first experienced twenty-four hours before again touched his spine.

"Max!" Dr. Coffee was giving orders now. The pathologist was directing the surgeon to proceed according to his microscopic diagnosis. "Max! Get a description of your sister's kid to the whole Northbank police force, the sheriff's office, and the State Police. The boy's in danger."

"Kidnaping, Doc?"

"An understatement, Max. Whoever killed Jimmy Jamaica—"

"You don't think Jimmy just dropped dead?"

"It's safer to assume he was murdered. Max, get moving!"

Esther Ritter Liebman was having her hysterics as quietly as she believed compatible with her status as a Doctor of Philosophy and the wife of a Professor of Comparative Religion. She lay on her chaise longue crying silently and taking an occasional sniff of smelling salts in the best turn-of-the-century manner.

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The professor was taking the disappearance of his adopted son calmly—almost to the point of apathy, Dr. Coffee thought as he listened to Max Ritter question his brother-in-law. There was no use losing one's head over this contretemps, said the professor, because that's what it was—a contretemps. Why foresee a possible tragic outcome when things would probably turn out all right?

"We have always encouraged young Irving to be self-reliant," he said, "and I have every confidence he is well able to take care of himself."

No, the boy had not telephoned. No, there had been no phone call demanding ransom or making threats.

"The phone has rung only once this afternoon since you called from the hospital," the professor said. "A Mrs. Gonzalez called. She's apparently the mother of one of Irving's classmates. She complained that Irving had been at her house talking to her son—I believe his name is Paco—and that Paco was very much upset. Paco wouldn't tell her what Irving and he had been talking about and when Irving left, Paco locked himself in his room. She wanted to know if we could tell her what had disturbed her son. Of course we could not. But the call indicated that Irving made one or more stops on his way home. So, you see, there is nothing to worry about."

"I hope you're not overoptimistic, Professor," said Dr. Coffee. "Could you tell us the names of some of your son's other school friends?"

"I'm afraid not," said the professor's wife, suddenly alert to the situation. "Irving never brought them home."

"I can name four," Max Ritter volunteered. "Besides Paco Gonzalez, there's Bill Cox, Hank Werner, and Wally Block. A couple of Saturdays ago I had a day off and I took Jake and his pals to the ball game."

"That's a side of you I never knew." Dr. Coffee smiled briefly. "Do you know where Jake's pals live?"

"Sure. I picked 'em up and took 'em home."

"Could you place their homes in serial order, say between Pasteur Hospital and here?"

"I guess so. The Cox place is closest to the hospital. Then comes Gonzalez, then Werner, and Block is nearest here."

"Get on the phone, Max, and find out if the boy called on any of his other buddies besides Gonzalez. I got the impression while he was in my lab that he thought I was trying to make him betray his friends—how I don't know."

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Ritter disappeared into the next room.

He was back in a few minutes with some notes scribbled on an envelope.

"I talked to Mrs. Cox," he reported. "She says Jake—par'me, Esther, Irving—came to see Bill about half-past one and the two of them went out to the backyard for a while. She don't know what they talked about but when Bill came in he made a phone call. She thinks it was to some girl because he's not talking about it, like he don't want to be considered a sissy. The Werners and the Blocks, both negative. Neither of them seen him today."

"So it looks as though the boy disappeared somewhere between the Gonzalez place and here, assuming he was coming home. Max, if you put enough men on that stretch right away you might find someone who saw what happened—if anything."

"Will do, Doc."

"Did you call the coroner?"

"I did. He says it's okay for you to do the P.M. If you want him to sign anything he'll come over."

"Then I'll get a bite to eat and run over to the hospital. If Jamaica's body is there, I'll do the autopsy tonight."

When Dr. Coffee walked into his laboratory, Dr. Mookerji and Doris Hudson were sharing sandwiches and a container of milk. A transistor radio was perched on the workbench between them, giving off tinny news bulletins.

"What are you two doing here so late?" Dr. Coffee asked. "Don't you know Pasteur doesn't pay overtime?"

"Salaam, Doctor Sahib," said the Hindu resident. "Have been hearing wireless reports of mysterious fatality in sweet shop. Believing same is perhaps client of Leftenant Ritter, staff is offering services."

"Besides, we were wondering if there was any news of that cute little boy who was here this afternoon," said Doris Hudson.

"The boy hasn't turned up yet." Dr. Coffee shook his head as he took off his jacket and slipped into a white smock. "Has that package from the coroner arrived yet?"

"Ten minutes ago, Doctor. They phoned from the basement."

"Then I'll accept your offer, Dr. Mookerji. Get our usual impedimenta together—we'll go right down and get to work. You'd better go home, Doris."

"If there's any news about the boy—"

"I'll phone you. Max has his troops mobilized. We're all

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worried. With reason, I'm afraid. Good night, Doris."

Max Ritter's phone call was transferred to the white-tiled room in the basement of Pasteur Hospital where the mortal remains of Jimmy Jamaica lay on a stainless-steel dissection table. Dr. Coffee had finished his external examination of the naked body and Dr. Mookerji was making notes. There were no wounds apparent.

He was about to make the first incision from the sternum through the navel when the clanger of the telephone bell shattered the solemn silence. Dr. Coffee put down his knife and picked up the instrument.

The boy was still missing, Ritter reported, but there were developments.

Among the fingerprints collected by the police experts from Jimmy Jamaica's place was a set apparently belonging to Maggie Dorwin. The Henry classification was telephoned to the F.B.I. in Washington. Within the hour the identification was made and her record telephoned to Northbank.

"Maggie got busted twice in Chicago," Ritter said. "Shoplifting. She did time and when she got out she came to Northbank. Her sister lives here."

"I suppose that's where Sergeant Kendall was going to look for her," Dr. Coffee suggested.

"She ain't there. I talked to Kendall after I got word from Washington."

"Look, Max. That shoplifting record ties in with all those watches and junk we found this afternoon. Why don't you check with Jake's pals and—"

"Already done, Doc. I talked to the Coxes, and they got Billy out of bed. He admitted Maggie was teaching the kids how to pick pockets, snatch handbags, and steal from stores. They got paid off in candy and gum and once in a while in nickels and dimes. So this afternoon Jake made the rounds of his friends to warn them he's going to blow the whistle on Jimmy and Maggie. When Jake left, Billy Cox phoned Jamaica to put him wise to what's going on."

"You think Jamaica sent somebody to intercept Jake while he was making the rounds of his friends?"

"Natch. I think Maggie grabbed him after he left the Cox place. He never got any farther. But we'll find him."

"I hope," said Dr. Coffee, "before—" He did not finish the sentence. That vague feeling of uneasiness came over him again. He looked at the waxen body on the gleaming table. "Max, I'm just starting on Jamaica. It

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shouldn't take more than two hours. Call me then. Or before, if you have any news of Jake."

When Doctors Coffee and Mookerji returned from the basement with their Mason jars and white enamel containers, Max Ritter was already waiting in the laboratory.

"Doc, what killed Jamaica?"

"Massive hemorrhage," said the pathologist, "and shock."

"Hemorrhage? Why didn't I see any blood?" The detective pushed his hat to the back of his head.

"We found over a quart of blood in the abdominal cavity."

"Hey. How come?"

"He had a ruptured liver—technically a saggital rupture between the two lobes. The hepatic artery was severed."

"Ain't that a funny way to die?"

"We see a ruptured liver occasionally—in an auto accident, a big fall, or anything that will smash the liver back against the spine. Have you heard from Sergeant Kendall since I spoke to you last?"

A blank expression crossed Ritter's face. He picked up the phone and dialed the police number. He asked to speak to Sergeant Kendall.

When he replaced the receiver his Adam's apple jounced twice.

"Kendall was unexpectedly called outa town," he said, almost without moving his lips. "Seems his father is dying in Chicago."

"Use your own judgment about getting out a warrant for Kendall," said Dr. Coffee, "but a man who can break two one-inch planks with a bare-handed karate chop can certainly rupture a man's liver. Jamaica was apparently a heavy drinker. His liver extended several inches below his rib cage. So if our Black Belt karate expert backed him against the wall behind his candy counter—Max, do you want me to give you a hypothetical picture of what must have happened?"

"I'm all ears."

"Okay. Kendall was on the Pickpocket Squad in Chicago. Maggie Dorwin is a convicted Chicago shoplifter. When they came to Northbank they were not strangers. Here they teamed up with Jamaica and started a sort of Fagin operation."

"What's a Fagin operation?"

"Don't you remember your Charles Dickens, Max? Fagin was the villain in *Oliver Twist* who trained children to be pickpockets. Let's say Maggie was the instructor and Jamaica recruited kids who already showed larcenous tendencies by stealing candy. Only Jake

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refused to be blackmailed into a life of crime, but he continued to steal candy because of this pathological craving for sweets. Our three-headed Fagin thereupon put pressure on Jake to join the team—first the school principal, then the fond parent, and finally the police in the person of cop-accomplice Sergeant Kendall. Do you follow me?"

"I'm way ahead of you," said Ritter. "Jake decided he had enough, but before he sprung the trap he warned his pals to stand clear if they could. But Billy Cox panicked and spilled to Jamaica—"

"Whereupon Jamaica panicked and called you, expecting to make some sort of deal," Dr. Coffee resumed. "But Sergeant Kendall came in, overheard part of the conversation, and started a fight with Jamaica. Maybe he didn't mean to kill him—you'll probably have a hard time making anything more than manslaughter stick after you catch up with him—but he did give him the karate chop.

"Maggie had been out shopping during this time. She came in during the argument and dropped her groceries when she heard the ruckus reaching a climax. We can assume that Jamaica was putting up some kind of fight by the rapidity with which rigor mortis developed. Maggie rushed downstairs to find Jamaica dead or dying. Kendall sent her out to intercept Jake.

"Then Kendall started to set up an alibi. He locked up the candy store and got you to join him in finding your wayward nephew."

"I bet the juvenile probation people never asked to see the kid at all," said Ritter. "I'll check in the morning."

The phone rang.

"Pathology. Doctor Coffee speaking . . . Yes, he's here. Do you—is that so? . . . Well, that's good news—superlative, in fact . . . You don't say! Certainly, we'll be over."

Dr. Coffee was grinning as he hung up.

"That was your sister Esther," he said. "The prodigy has returned."

"Jake's back?"

Dr. Coffee nodded. "He just got home—in a taxi."

Irving Liebman, Junior obviously enjoyed being the center of attention. He displayed less emotion (his Oriental blood, no doubt) than his foster parents as he described the afternoon and evening he had spent with Maggie Dorwin at the Riverside Motel.

No, he said, he hadn't been afraid when she asked him to get into her car near the

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Gonzalez home. He was curious about where she was going to take him and what she might try to do to him. It turned out she wasn't quite sure about these points herself, because she drove around aimlessly for an hour or so, as if she couldn't make up her mind. Suddenly she said aloud, "The hell with Kendall! I'm just a minor league crook. I'm not a killer or a kidnaper. Why can't I keep on being just a dip and a shoplifter?"

The boy remembered her exact words with the total recall with which he remembered batting averages.

Maggie drove into the parking lot behind a shopping center and locked the boy in the car while she bought some chocolate bars and a bottle of whiskey. She then proceeded to the motel, where she registered, paid in advance, locked them both in the cabin, and hid the key in the bosom of her dress. She then addressed herself to the bottle seeking an answer to her dilemma.

She debated with herself in ringing tones. Should she take the kid to the rendezvous Kendall had designated? Or should she just sit here and hope Kendall wouldn't find her, because he would beat the hell out of her if he did? Or should she call the cops, turn over the kid, and tell them what Kendall did to Jimmy Jamaica, even though that would mean she'd go right back into the pokey?

As the evening wore on and the level in the bottle went steadily down, she reached no decision. Meanwhile she was dozing off for a few seconds at a time, but not long enough for Jake to get at her key.

The boy had finally managed to escape by locking himself in the bathroom, standing on the toilet seat, and squeezing through the tiny window.

"How did you pay the taxi?" Dr. Coffee asked. "Would a Northbank cabbie extend credit to a small boy who hailed him in the middle of the night?"

"Oh, I had money," the boy said. "I showed the driver the ten-dollar bill I borrowed from Maggie."

"You borrowed—?"

"Well, I took it out of her handbag. I watched her one day when Maggie was, you know, teaching the kids how to open a woman's bag without the woman noticing. It looked easy, and it is. I tried it, and Maggie didn't notice." He turned to Professor Liebman. "If you want to pay it back, sir, you could take it out of my allowance—a quarter a week. I think Maggie is still at the motel. She's in Cabin Six."

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She was indeed in Cabin Six when the police arrived—out cold.

In response to a broadcast by Detective Lieutenant Max Ritter of the Northbank Homicide Squad, the New York Police picked up Sergeant Kendall at Kennedy Airport as he boarded a plane for Mexico.

"What I can't understand, Irving," Professor Liebman said to Jake before sending him to bed on the night of the prodigy's return, "is the reason you got into this woman's car so readily, knowing she had been engaging in criminal activities. Why didn't you cry out or run for help? Why?"

"Well," the boy replied, "I thought this was a good chance for me to learn more about crooks, in case like I should decide I wanted to be a detective like Uncle Max."

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